

Whose Side are You On?¹

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"Well, whose side are you on anyway?" Delia Livingston almost shouted toward her coworkers. To supervisor Aaron Richardson the question was too simplistic. But he understood from previous conversations that Delia felt the case management team was not supporting her client at all. As Delia would say, "You guys just want to drop services and watch Stephanie drown to prove that she will fail. Why can't we just support Stephanie until she leaves our program? Maybe she will succeed, especially if all of you give her a chance!"

If it were only that simple, Aaron thought. If only it were just a matter of picking sides with Stephanie, not to mention Delia.

Des Moines, Iowa

Des Moines, the capital city of Iowa, offered a pleasant blend of hometown, Midwestern friendliness and downtown sophistication. The city had a population of nearly 200,000; the racial breakdown is approximately 82% White, 8% Black, 7% Hispanic, 3% Asian. Compared to bigger, coastal cities, people in Des Moines enjoyed a low cost of living and high quality of life. The median household income was \$26,703 and the average cost of a single family home was \$94,200. The unemployment rate was about 2%.

All Saints Community Services—Des Moines

The long winding driveway leading to All Saint's Des Moines facility was lined with green grass and old oak trees. The pastoral feel of the driveway belied the facility's location in the heart of the city. Once visitors reached the third and final curve in the road, All Saints popped out of the landscape. All Saints occupied an eight-story, turn of the century brick hospital that had been converted into a community center. The furniture from the old hospital reception area remained untouched. Because so many programs were housed in All Saints, commotion reigned in the lobby. The 20-line telephone systems buzzed with incoming calls, children romped in a modest play area in the corner, adults were scattered around the room looking distracted or beleaguered. The receptionist's desk sat in the center of the room. She was in constant motion as she tried to attend to people who approached her desk, answered external phone calls

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coming into the center and responded to requests from program staff who called the reception area, "Just wondering if you happened to see whether Miss Perkins walked out. We are looking for her...."

All Saints Community Services—Des Moines had a Housing and Homeless Department that provided programs on a "continuum of care" designed to break the cycle of homelessness. To participate in a program, all clients required a referral. These referrals typically came from homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, and substance abuse treatment programs. The continuum consisted of three separate transitional housing programs, and residents often advanced through all three programs allowing them to receive housing services for almost four years.

The first level of the program was called the Main Street program, referring to the address where the program was housed. During the course of the three month program, clients lived in a shelter and learned about budgeting skills and social skills. Upon graduation from the three month program, clients could apply to the second level of the program.

The second level of the program lasted 18 months and was called the Residential Opportunities for Personal Advancement (ROPA). Participants in this program lived in apartments with varying levels of support services. Services initiated in the three month program at Main Street could continue in combination with additional wrap around services from other agencies often housed within the four walls of All Saints. At minimum, the client received weekly case management and continued a daily routine which included working, attending school or participating in a day program. All clients had a source of income generated through working or through government entitlements like Social Security Income (SSI). The clients paid thirty percent of their income to All Saints although in reality the "rent" was held in escrow for clients to use as a down payment on a house.

Community Situated Housing (CSH) was the third level of the program. Participants moved into agency owned single-family dwellings where they continued working on vocational, educational and life skills goals. Participants could remain in this program for up to 24 months. They continued to receive minimal monitoring and case management services although the objective and expectation was to move the client rapidly toward fully independent living.

Main Street Program Residential Halls

The mostly controlled chaos in the main lobby made the fourth, seventh and eight floors seem that much more serene. The Main Street program took up the entire fourth floor, and the ROPA program filled the seventh and eighth floors. In addition, there was a spacious conference room with a sturdy maple, oval-shaped table in the center of the room and twelve swiveling, cushioned executive chairs evenly spaced around the table.

To protect residents and control foot traffic, the residential floors were

defended by a security system that would not allow the elevator to stop on the residential floors unless the correct code was entered. When the elevator doors opened onto the seventh and eighth floors, the acrid aroma of Sudanese cooking wafted down a long luminous hallway. Simple doors along the hallway led to each family's apartment. Within each apartment, space was at a premium. There were 10 apartments, five on the seventh floor and five on the eighth floor. Those apartments housed 10 families consisting of single women, women with children or married couples with children. There were no single men or men with children because the agency was faith based and frowned upon cohabitation even if only by floor. The seventh floor housed the case manager's office while the program director's office was on the eighth floor.

The apartments were literally the size of two hospital rooms with the shared wall knocked out. Residents were allowed to decorate the carpeted and furnished rooms as they chose and each residence was a reflection of the family who lived there.

Although All Saints did not sponsor a daycare program, it rented space on the premises to a licensed day care center that welcomed children whose parents participated in any of the All Saints program.

Housing and Homeless Department Case Management Team

Each week, the Housing and Homeless Department Case Management team gathered in a conference room on the eighth floor to discuss each client's progress. The team consisted of Dr. Bennett, the consulting psychologist; Martie Smith, the director of the Main Street program, Rachel Dauer, Petra Patterson and Beverly Leer, case managers for Main Street program; Aaron Richardson, the director of the ROPA and CSH programs, Delia Livingston, the case manager for the ROPA program, Bern Dafur, the case manager for the CSH program; and April Richardson and Lillian Sullivan, parent aids from an intensive family preservation program located in another department.

Aaron Richardson

Aaron Richardson, LCSW, was the director of the ROPA and CSH programs as well as two other programs in the Housing and Homeless Prevention Department. Consequently, he frequently rushed from meeting to meeting as he attended to the various administrative tasks required for managing the four programs.

Aaron Richardson wanted to have a quietly powerful impact at All Saints. Aaron's voice was soothing and measured and it seemed to fit perfectly with his medium stature, dull reddish hair, and wardrobe of dress pants and freshly pressed Oxford shirts. Each year, employees at All Saints participated in regular evaluations providing them anonymous feedback from their peers. Aaron's reviewers consistently said he was fair, a person of reason, and they liked

working for him. When asked to identify weaknesses, Aaron's reviewers said sometimes team members got frustrated because he was just a little too nice. Aaron knew sometimes people took advantage of his kindness but he thought, *If given a choice, I prefer optimism.*

Delia Livingston

Delia Livingston was a pleasantly plump middle aged White woman with short, red hair. If anyone could relate to a client's plight, Delia could. She frequently reminded Aaron that in her early twenties, she had graduated from a domestic violence transitional housing program with three children in tow. Although the two older children were now adults and gone from home, a teenage son challenged her maternal and social work skills. She said it seemed that "the authorities" were calling her every other week to report some new violation by her son, from public drinking to vandalism. Compounding her stress, Delia told Aaron she was struggling to finish her last semester of an MSW program. She sometimes complained that the professors' demands seemed endless. Then there was work. Delia was working full time in the All Saints program trying to schedule her work hours between classes and field placement commitments and necessary attention to her son and most of the time she felt unsupported.

Delia told Aaron that she was still smarting from her "demotion" to Level 2 programs. Delia would sit in Aaron's office and recall her former supervisor's voice and facial expressions. Delia would look at Aaron and say, "Do you know what Martie said to me?" Aaron knew but he let Delia vent. Delia continued in an exaggerated, matter of fact tone of voice, "She said, 'To be honest, Delia, this arrangement is not working.' Delia took a breath and then continued, "They forced me to make a "lateral move" from my case management position in the Level-One program to the Level Two Program. Delia voice became artificially lilted as she said "lateral move." Aaron understood that Delia perceived the move as a demotion although it technically was a lateral transition. He also knew that Martie felt that Delia was underperforming. Instead of firing Delia, Theresa, head of the Housing and Homeless Prevention Department, moved Delia into the Level-Two program because Theresa believed it would be less demanding and better suit Delia's school schedule.

Delia told Aaron that Martie was always "setting me up to fail" and when he became her new supervisor, Delia made no effort to hide her joy. In particular, Delia told Aaron that she respected him because he had recently withstood the rigors of completing an MSW program himself. From other supervisees, Aaron heard that Delia was "counting on" him to be on her side. "He's really nice," she reportedly said, "I can trust him."

Stephanie Davis

Aaron knew that the team was torn about admitting Stephanie Davis to the All Saints level two program. She was not the strongest candidate but the team wanted to see the family succeed, especially for the sake of the children.

Stephanie was a 28 year old biracial woman with café latte coloring and black curly hair. She normally wore loose fitting jeans and t-shirts over her petite frame. Stephanie's mild mental retardation was not apparent, at least not during brief conversations. After a longer exchange, however, an astute conversant would realize there was a "disconnect" somewhere. But Stephanie was one of those people who just blended into the background. Most of the time, she apparently wanted to be left alone.

Stephanie had a troubled past. Her former boyfriend, the father of her two preschool children, had a history of substance abuse and he was violent toward Stephanie. The family had repeated involvement with Child Protective Services and the children were removed from Stephanie's custody for a brief period of time because Stephanie left the children at home unsupervised. Eventually, Stephanie fled to a domestic violence shelter with the children. While Stephanie was in the shelter and before Stephanie came to All Saints, CPS removed the children from Stephanie's custody for a second time due to parental neglect related to lack of supervision.

By the time Stephanie arrived at All Saints, the children's father was in jail and Stephanie was instructed to refuse him contact with the children. CPS agreed to return the children to Stephanie's custody if she enrolled in the All Saints program. Although Stephanie arrived at All Saints alone, her 3 year old son and her 5 year old daughter joined Stephanie at All Saints shortly after she arrived.

Because she was able to maintain stable employment, a work history was one of Stephanie's strengths. Stephanie worked a highly structured telemarketing job and performed satisfactorily because she dutifully followed the script. The job was a good fit for Stephanie.

A Tense Team Meeting

About one year into the 18 month program, tensions began to mount within Stephanie's case management team as the date for her discharge approached. Delia, as Stephanie's case manager, presented her case to the team. Aaron noticed that Delia had bags under her eyes and she was rifling through papers in her files distractedly as the team reported on other residents.

When Aaron said, "Well, let's move on to Stephanie Davis' case," a noticeable tremor shook Delia's body. April, one of the parent aids, rolled her eyes and looked knowingly at one of the other case managers.

"Umm. Davis. Stephanie." Delia tried to thumb through a stack of papers tucked into the notepad she brought to the staffing to take notes. Aaron could see

that mixed with some All Saints' forms were readings from her MSW program with occasional yellow highlighting in the text. Delia, unable to put her hands on the information she sought, looked up at the group and said, "Stephanie continues to go to work and everything seems to be going well. People are checking on Stephanie's children down in daycare and everybody seems fine. Everything seems to be ok."

Petra, one of the case managers from the far end of the table, who had been reclining in the board room style chair, sat upright planting her feet firmly on the floor and leaning into the table. "Delia, everything is NOT going OK."

Heads moved from Petra and then back to Delia. Delia stared straight ahead, expressionless.

"I went to her place last night at ten," Petra continued, "just because I happened to be here, and found out she hadn't given her children dinner—yet—and they were still up and running around. I had to get her to fix dinner and put them in the bath." Petra looked directly at Delia, who sat motionless, looking down at her notepad. "So things AREN'T going OK," Petra repeated.

"Well, I stopped by there around 4:00 last week and no one was there," Delia responded.

Lillian, a family preservation specialist, looked over and said matter-of-factly, "Stephanie does not finish work until 4:00 and then she has to wait for the bus to bring her home and then sometimes the kids are not ready to leave daycare right away, if they are in the middle of an art project or something...Remember we talked about this last week. It is best to catch her at night, late.

"Yes. Right." Delia said, fiddling with her pen.

Aaron made a mental note to request that Delia give him another copy of her schedule. *She forgot to give that to me on Monday, again, he thought to himself. I am buried, too. I do not have time to track her down, but she knows I want a schedule. I ask her for one after every staffing so we all know when to expect her.* Aaron felt blood rushing to his head. *Anger. Breathe. Just breathe.*

"OK. I just have to get something off of my chest." It was April. Of the two family preservation specialists, she was the one known for her direct approach. Aaron held his breath. He could feel Delia sink lower into her chair. "I think we are heading for disaster here because Stephanie cannot take care of those kids without any support and I doubt she's going to be ready in six months."

Aaron looked at Delia, who just stared absently at the wall before she found her voice. "Well," she said weakly, "the parade of service providers through Stephanie's door is virtually endless and . . ."

Rachel, another case manager, spoke from the far end of the table. She sincerely was trying to diminish the tension. "Did you call DSS and ask for Stephanie's former case manager to help?"

Delia just looked blank.

"Stephanie is very concrete in her thinking," Dr. Bennett interjected, "so perhaps we need to take a concrete approach. What does the team think about adding behavior modification goals to her plan?"

"We are trying." April's deep voice filled the room. "We asked Stephanie, 'What kind of things do you want' and started trying but she's somewhat resistant to following the program. She says, 'I can take care of my children on my own if you would just stay out of my way'."

Dr. Bennett furrowed his eyebrows and then said, "Have we at least gotten in touch with other service providers to see if we can convince them to monitor the family now."

"Right." Delia immediately started scribbling on her notepad, "Yes. Right."

Petra swiveled her chair in Delia's direction. "We talked about that last week—you know, you cannot let this go on any further. It's not fair, Delia. You are not following up on this situation with Stephanie."

Delia did not make eye contact with anyone.

"You gotta follow through," Petra emphasized each word as she spoke.

Beverly said, "You know what, I WILL DO IT. I will just do it because we don't have much time here and this thing is going to blow up."

As quickly as Beverly volunteered, Martie put her hand across the table in between Beverly and Delia. "NO" Then calmer, "No, you will not. That's Delia's job."

"Stephanie does not want to have anything to do with CPS!" Delia blurted. "If we upset her enough, she could just take off and leave. She already resents all of these services and I understand her position because I was there. I have walked in her shoes."

April sighed audibly. "We understand, Delia," April said in that slow measured way people use when they are growing impatient. "But don't you think it is better to force CPS's hand while Stephanie is here so we can at least make sure the kids don't get hurt? I am concerned about the children here."

Lillian looked around the room and then added, "And Delia, if we don't do anything and let her fail, the children may be removed for the third time."

April's frustration was visible. She said, "Speaking of removal, even if you did not reach DSS Family Preservation, did you at least reach the CPS case manager who handled Stephanie's case last time? I think that was Rachel's question."

"Was I supposed to contact her?" Delia looked dazed.

April pursed her lips.

"Delia, we talked about this last week, remember?" Aaron felt the annoyance he had quieted earlier resurface and percolate into the back of his neck, his cheeks and ears. *She does NOT know what she's talking about—again. She is making both of us look bad—again. I'm at my wits end with her. I don't know if I can avoid firing her before she graduates and leaves this spring.*

Dr. Bennett cleared his throat. "I suggest we address this again after Delia has contacted the CPS worker or Family Preservation or both. Let's move on for today."

Hallway Chats and Supervision Sessions

As Aaron walked toward his office after the meeting, he saw two other case managers lingering outside of his door, waiting for him to return so they could get some guidance. While he was in meetings, voice mail messages had a way of stacking up, too. So by the time the afternoon rolled around, Aaron was less focused on Delia but still concerned. He took the elevator down to Delia's office on the seventh floor.

Delia's door was open and Aaron was somewhat surprised to find her still there.

"Hey, Delia," Aaron said, pausing in the open doorway.

"Hi, Aaron."

"What's goin' on?"

"Oh. I'm trying to get outta here. I have to get back to campus to meet with my policy group. Do you need anything in particular?"

Do I need anything in particular, Aaron thought without saying anything. Yeah. I would like for you do at least a little of All Saint's work since we're paying you and depending on you. Do you think that might be possible?

Aaron felt the tension, and told himself, *Breath*. He slowly shut the door behind him and sat on an old loveseat along the wall. "Delia, I was little surprised in the team meeting today when you said you had not had a chance to talk to Amy. I mean, I know it's hard to reach CPS employees but you have been waiting for this return phone call for two weeks now."

"Well, I just do not know why everyone is focusing on Stephanie," Delia responded.

"Well, I think we are concerned about Stephanie because she is just six months away from discharge and it is, I think, the general consensus of the team that Stephanie will fail if..."

"Well," Delia interrupted, "I understand how the clients feel because I was there. I was in Stephanie's shoes and the team is not helping by breathing down her neck, always pointing out her weaknesses. She's trying. I was there in her shoes. I was THERE."

"Delia, I appreciate your sense of empathy but you are NOT there now." Aaron steadied his voice, "Now you are in the role of being her case manager and now you have to find some way to identify with how frustrating it is for Stephanie and still fulfill your obligation to provide the services we promised."

"OK," Delia threw up her arms, "fine." Then she noticed her watch. "Oh! I gotta go." She grabbed her purse, leaving a stack of files on the desk. "I am going to call Amy right way, Aaron, I will. And Aaron, I am so glad you are here because I can trust you. You aren't like Martie and Theresa."

Delia left Aaron standing in her office, frustrated.

I just want to see her get through this last semester of school and then she told me she will leave on her own and with her degree, Aaron thought as he walked to the elevator. He pushed the button to the elevator to head up to the eighth floor.

When the doors opened, Theresa was standing there. They exchanged greetings as Aaron walked into the elevator.

Aaron leaned against the wall of the elevator, tired. "I just had to have another supervisory session with Delia. I just don't get it with her."

Theresa looked over at him as the elevator door closed. She paused for a second and then said, "I knew this was going to happen. I told you this was going to happen. Remember, before you got here they were going to fire her at Main Street and I took her in because I felt bad for her. That was a mistake."

The elevator arrived at the eighth floor. "I don't think you're doing the right thing here," Theresa said looking compassionately at Aaron. Then Theresa pressed the "door close" button so they could remain in the elevator and finish the conversation. "I think you are being way too nice. You need to hold her feet to the fire. Delia works for our residents; we can't keep treating her like one." The elevator doors reopened, reminding them both that they needed to move on. "But it's your program," Teresa said as she exited. Someone down the hall motioned to her frantically. Theresa looked at Aaron. "Gotta go. Let me know if you want to talk some more."

Field Trips

Later that week, Aaron was wading through piles of paper work, hoping to see the bottom of his desk by the close of business when someone knocked on his wide open door. It was Lillian, one of the family preservation specialists

"Look who came to visit us on the third floor," she smiled artificially as she ushered Stephanie's two children into the room, holding each by the hand.

The five year old stood confidently, while the younger child squirmed impatiently.

April, the other family preservation specialist, appeared from behind Lillian and she did not look light hearted as she mouthed silently, so the children would not hear, "Stephanie does not manage these kids."

Addressing the children, April said, "Come on, you guys, let's go back home now." Lillian released the children's hands to April who marched them out of Aaron's office and down the hall toward their Mom's apartment.

Lillian glanced back at Aaron with a mournful look. "I am not sure Stephanie is engaged enough to want to...you know, exercise parental control."

Aaron knew it was true. Stephanie was obedient, very obedient. When people were trying to help her with her independent living skills it felt like she was being obedient

Aaron and Lillian conversed for a few more minutes about the challenges Stephanie presented to the team.

"There was just no energy coming from her on an emotional level," Lillian said.

"I know," Aaron said. "Dr. Bennett didn't think that Stephanie's behavior qualified as an attachment disorder but that's how it seems sometimes."

"Sometimes?" Lillian repeated, emphatically. "It seems that way, A LOT."

Aaron glanced at his watch and panicked. He had so much to do! Aaron tried to transition the conversation back to case management so that Delia could take action.

"Well," Aaron said, "Why don't we see if Delia is in her office so we can..."

"She did not even know they were gone." April had returned to the room still storming.

"Who didn't know?" Aaron asked. "Delia?"

"No," the aid snorted, "Delia wasn't in her office."

"We checked before we came to you," Lillian said as she looked toward her colleague. "April meant that Stephanie didn't even know the kids were gone." Then she returned to Aaron, "I know Stephanie cares about her children but there is no real sense of empathy or connection to them."

As she plopped into one of Aaron's chairs, April said. "It's not just the children. That's how we all experience Stephanie. I mean, is she capable of caring for these children 'cause it seems as if she isn't very attached to them? She treats them like she treats her script at work. She just goes in and does it with out any sense of engagement. It is not normal." Aaron, Lillian and April discussed the family for nearly an hour. Both Lillian and April talked about how Stephanie's five year old had developed an adult sense of autonomy because her mother did not know how to exercise control. Aaron knew. He saw it, too.

After Lillian and April left, Aaron went downstairs to see whether Delia was there. She wasn't. So Aaron stopped by Stephanie's apartment. As a supervisor, Aaron tried hard not to intervene with client families but he knew Stephanie personally. *She's probably upset, he thought. I've seen her after one of the professionals tries to intervene; she gets really defensive.*

Through the closed door, Aaron could hear Stephanie fussing. "I am tired of this. I am sick of them picking on me. I don't have to stay here no more."

Aaron knocked on the door. Stephanie opened it almost immediately. She had little beads of perspiration over her upper lip and her eyes were piercing. "To hell with 'em. I am going to go." Stephanie gave him her back and started storming around the room, moving objects from one location to another but not really packing or tidying up the litter on the floor.

"Ummm, where are the kids?" Aaron asked.

"I KNOW WHERE THEY ARE," Stephanie hollered. Then with less force she added, "They're in their room."

"Listen, Stephanie, I understand that you are frustrated, and I..."

"I AM MAD!" she shouted.

"Yes." Aaron continued, "And I would be mad too if"

"I AM GOING. They can't keep me here. They keep getting into my business with my kids and I can take care of my kids and I don't need them comin' up here and messing around with me when I am fine and I can take care of my kids."

"Well, where are you going to go?"

"I can get a hotel room."

Aaron moved some stuffed animals from the sofa and took a seat. Stephanie threw laundry from a chair to the floor and threw herself into the chair.

"OK," Aaron said, "How many days do you think you will be able to stay?"

Stephanie threw up her arms and looked to the ceiling. "I don't know . . . few days."

She and Aaron talked for about an hour discussing the possibilities. By the end of the conversation, things were calm enough that the children ventured out of their room.

Aaron played with the children for a minute and then stood up to leave. At the door, out of ear-shot of the children, he whispered "Listen, I know you're tired of everyone telling you how to take care of your children, but I think April and Lillian are very good at what they do. We're just trying to help you be ready to leave and want to make sure you and the children can stay together when you leave. When Lillian and April come tomorrow, why don't you tell them you are mad and see if you can work it out, OK?"

Stephanie did not respond, so Aaron added, "Think about it and we can talk about it later" as he walked out of the door.

The Calls

Later will not come, Aaron thought, as he heard Stephanie's door close behind him. Stephanie had a history of storming and then calming down and then storming again. Aaron doubted he would hear from Stephanie until the next time someone offended her. For the time being, the crisis had passed but Aaron remained concerned. He walked by Delia's office again. The door was still closed, so he returned to his office to call CPS. *I may just have to make the call this time because Delia seems so overwhelmed*. It was not the first time he had called the agency to see whether he could get help for Stephanie.

"Hi. This is Aaron Richardson and I am calling from All Saints about Stephanie Davis, case number JD 443578. Stephanie's going to be leaving us in about six months and she's not going to be able to take care of these children by herself . . . at least not by our assessment. We would like you to provide some wrap around services so she can get continue to get the support she needs."

Aaron started to describe Stephanie's inattention to the children in detail but he could hear the case manager at the other end shuffling papers. She was probably reading as he talked.

"Mr. Richardson, we have recorded your concern, but she seems to be doing FINE now."

"Well she IS doing fine, now," Aaron tried to keep his temper as he responded, "because we have been propping her up with all of the supports we have in place. There are three different case managers other than our case manager and two family preservation specialists all helping to support Stephanie and all of those services are going to end in just a couple of months."

"But as I said, Mr. Richardson, she seems to be doing FINE right NOW."

Aaron put his hand over the phone so that she would not hear him take an enormous cleansing breath. "I understand she is fine NOW, but when we discharge her in six months we can almost GUARANTEE that you are going to have to go out there and intervene when the situation gets bad AND IT WON'T TAKE VERY LONG."

It felt like talking to a wall. DSS simply would not do it. "Busy" "Overwhelmed." "No time." "She's doing fine."

Team Meeting

The next week the team gathered in the conference room. Delia rushed into the room, her face flushed from hurrying. The team worked through the other clients, until only one file remained. It was Stephanie's.

Dr. Bennett carefully avoided peering in Delia's direction. "Well, how are things progressing with Stephanie?"

Delia responded, "Everything's OK."

"No. No, that is not true. It is NOT OK, Delia." Beverly looked almost fierce. "Just last week someone found the kids playing in the toy corner in the lobby. That is right by the front door! It is definitely NOT OK."

"I talked to Stephanie about it and she knows she needs to pay closer attent..."

Aaron stepped in. "CPS continues to refuse to open the case. They will not get involved until she fails."

"Can you explain that to me?" Dr. Bennett asked.

Aaron wished he did not have to explain. He wanted to encourage Delia to seize the opportunity, to reclaim control of Stephanie's case but he knew that was unlikely. *She is hopelessly overwhelmed*, he thought.

April sneezed in the corner and Aaron remembered Dr. Bennett's question. Aaron said firmly, "I have spoken to the DSS worker who handled Stephanie's case before she came here and I explained that Stephanie requires the support of several of our staff to make sure she is taking care of the kids and I told her that I was worried that the kids would be neglected when Stephanie leaves our contained environment. The DSS worker told me that as long as there were no obvious signs of neglect there was no justification for DSS to intervene."

"So, do we withdraw the extra support now and let her fail and then force DSS's hand to get services before she leaves?" Dr. Bennett asked in his usual direct manner.

The room was silent.

"Well, that still doesn't seem ethical," said Rachel, a case manager from one of the other support programs. "I mean, we should not be setting our clients up to fail when our whole goal is to help someone be successful. I mean, whose side are we on?"

"Let's be honest, though," Aaron said, "really we are providing a façade that

Stephanie is being successful.”

“That’s right,” Delia said, “we’re setting her up to potentially lose her kids.”

Everyone in the room stared at her. *She just doesn’t get it*, thought Aaron, *unless things turn around quickly she WILL lose her kids.*

“My concern is keeping the kids safe,” Martie said. “If we let her fail now, they will be safe at least.”

April looked over at Delia. “Didn’t we decide last week that you were going to contact CPS Family Preservation during the week to do some follow up to see if we could find alternative services?”

Aaron saw several people in the room nod their heads. He knew it was true; she had committed to contacting Family Preservation.

“Right. Yes. Well, I called Amy over in Family Pres but she has not called me back yet.”

Beverly, a normally stoic case manager, dropped the pen she was holding with a look of disgust. Aaron sensed more rolling of eyes although he did not dare redirect his eyes from Delia.

Barbara picked up her pen slowly, deliberately, as if she were gathering all restraint before she spoke. “The team is worried about Stephanie, really, REALLY worried, Delia. Do you hear that?”

Lillian, always the peacemaker, chimed in. “Look, Delia, it’s not like we’re saying you failed. Stephanie was a marginal candidate for the program when we accepted her. I distinctly remember discussions about whether she could succeed, but in the end the team wanted to rally behind Stephanie. But we do really NEED to rally behind her.”

With arms folded across her chest, April said emphatically, “We’re getting close to discharge here. We have to do something—NOW!”

“Well whose side are you on anyway?” Delia almost shouted.

“That’s a fair question,” Dr. Bennett said. “And I think we really need to make a decision. Are we going to drop services and allow Stephanie to sink or swim while we can still protect the children or are we going to support Stephanie until she leaves our program knowing that she will likely fail shortly after discharge?”

Aaron recognized another question embedded in Dr. Bennett’s question. *Do I let Delia sink by demanding that she fulfill her duties or do I protect her and allow her to finish her MSW program knowing her work performance has been marginal. Whose side am I on?*