

7/14/11 – Janis Tondora training – CSP/RP Team Leaders Forum

Roma: An example for person-centered planning training

History, Demographics, and Presenting Issue

Roma is a 29 year old, Puerto Rican female who has been treated on and off in the New Haven system of care for 15 years due to problems associated with her diagnosis of major depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and poly-substance abuse. She was incarcerated from 2008 to 2009 for drug-related offenses (possession of heroin, theft, prostitution) and risk of injury to a minor (repeated DUI with children in her car; leaving children unattended during drug binges). During this time, her children (a 14 year-old daughter and a 9 year old son) were in the custody of her cousin who is a supportive influence in Roma's life and recovery. Upon her release from prison 4 months ago, Roma was referred to outpatient mental health and addiction services, and began living with her cousin and her kids. However, she started drinking and then stole several of her cousin's prescriptions medications including Vicodin and Xanax. During one incident, the cousin had left the kids overnight in Roma's care so she could attend an out-of-state funeral. When she returned, Roma was passed out on the couch and she had no idea where her 9-year-old was. It turned out that the 9-year-old was playing basketball at the local community court, but Roma later admitted that she had left the kids alone the night before to go out and buy drugs. In addition, Roma's cousin tells you that Roma had been having great difficulty setting limits with the children, and that she relates to them more as a friend than a maternal figure. In addition, there were frequent verbal "blow-outs" with her teenage daughter, and on one occasion, Roma slapped her across the face when she was high. Roma's cousin is very concerned about Roma's continued drug use and her volatile relationship with her daughter, so she asked Roma to leave the apartment until she "cleaned up her act."

CT DCF has been involved in Roma's case for several years given her previous charges and difficulties taking care of the kids. When Roma had to leave her cousin's apartment, her DCF worker suggested she seek temporary housing and services at Columbus House. She has been at the shelter now for 3 weeks, and she makes it clear that she wants to work toward re-gaining custody of her children with the help of her mental health providers. Her cousin is willing to let Roma visit with the kids provided that she sees Roma is taking steps to get her life back on track. According to conditions outlined in her probation order and her DCF mandates, Roma must engage in mental health and addictions treatment, secure stable housing, pursue employment of disability benefits for financial security, and demonstrate adequate parenting skills before she can regain legal custody of her children.

Family Background/Early Childhood

Born in Puerto Rico, Roma is the 4th of 5 children. Her mother reportedly suffered from serious mental illness and abandoned the children when Roma was 6 years old. She was then raised by her maternal grandmother for two years until the age of 8 when the grandmother passed away suddenly. She moved in with her biological father, who began an incestuous relationship with Roma which lasted until Roma became pregnant by him at the age of 14. Roma ran away from home, and with the help of neighbors, she contacted extended family in the U.S. and re-located to New York to live with a maternal aunt and uncle. The aunt and uncle are now deceased, but Roma continues to be close with her cousin who currently has legal custody of her children.

Education/Employment

Upon re-locating to the U.S., Roma enrolled in high-school while her aunt and uncle assisted with child care responsibilities for her daughter. She was an average student, but an avid reader who also excelled in creative writing and arts classes. However, she quickly became involved in a number of abusive relationships, and turned to drugs and alcohol as she became increasingly depressed. Roma dropped out of school mid-way in her Junior year. She has worked off/on as a housecleaner for the past decade;

however, difficulties with mental health issues and substance abuse, as well as an additional pregnancy (from a brief relationship) have made it difficult for her to finish school or maintain a job for any period of time. While at the Shelter, she has shown responsibilities with chores and responsibilities around the program and, under the supervision of one of the Shelter administrative staff, she has been volunteering to help with some clerical and reception tasks.

Health Status

Roma was recently diagnosed with early-stage cirrhosis of the liver secondary to years of alcohol abuse and binge drinking.

Mental Health Symptoms & Treatment

Roma has had periods in the past where she has been so depressed she has had recurrent thoughts of suicide. On two occasions (over 5 years ago), she overdosed on her meds requiring both medical and psychiatric hospitalization. Currently, Roma denies suicidal ideation, and she has been using her meds effectively to alleviate her symptoms. Despite this, she reports that her “nerves” continue to cause her great distress. She has severe sleep disturbance (unable to sleep through the night due to nightmares), and she is sometimes too depressed and exhausted to get out of bed in the morning. This has made it very difficult for her to look for work or an apartment as she is feeling very overwhelmed. In addition, she admits to being irritable and having volatile interpersonal relationships, especially with her eldest daughter, with whom she has frequent verbal (and on one occasion, physical) arguments.

Alcohol/Drug Use

While Roma has had periods of time where she has abused marijuana, heroin, and prescription drugs, her drug of choice for the past ten years has been alcohol. When drinking, her judgment can be significantly impaired (e.g., she has left her children unattended) and her behavior is aggressive (e.g., she was arrested in 2001 for assaulting her then-boyfriend with a broken vodka bottle). Despite previous criminal charges and the current involvement of DCF, Roma tends to minimize her past alcohol and drug abuse use stating that she needed to drink to “numb out” as she couldn’t handle the stress of her life. While Roma has not had any positive tox screens reported by her clinician, Roma does admit to “slips” and her cousin reports that her attendance at AA/NA has dropped off in the past two months. Roma herself admits to having increased cravings, but says she has been clean since staying at the shelter and she seems motivated to stay sober and to find alternative, healthy ways to manage her stress levels.

Strengths, Interests, and Goals

Roma is in the active stage of change. She is motivated to make progress in her recovery and put her “life back together.” She recognizes the need to replace her drinking and drug use with positive stress management strategies. She is also a deeply loving mother who has managed, with the support of her cousin, to provide for her children through the years despite a serious trauma history and subsequent mental health and addiction issues. She has a strong desire to improve her relationship with her children, and wants to be a better role model for them. She is well-liked by other clients at the Shelter, and has done well as a volunteer in the Reception area where she has been answering phones and directing guests. Throughout her struggles in life, Roma has always “escaped” through painting as well as reading and writing poetry. She is highly creative and enjoys all forms of artistic expression. She hopes to finish high-school and someday find work in an environment where she can be around books or artists.