

Children's Board ASO Helps Farm Worker Family in Housing Crisis

The Children's Board of Hillsborough County-led Administrative Services Organization (ASO) is a financial tool used to help children and their families identify, select, arrange, and pay for supports and services with qualified community providers.

The ASO supports a wraparound process in which case managers work with families to identify their strengths, goals, needs, and their own service providers through the development of a family support plan. As ASO funds are to be used as a last resort, case managers are responsible for helping families locate services and supports that are either funded by other sources or that naturally exist in the community. Find out more about the ASO at http://www.childrensboard.org/aso_resources_providers.aspx.

Following is a Heart of the ASO success story involving a family working with Beth El Farmworker Ministries:



The Heart of the ASO – Interview with Brunilda Rentas, Supervisor with Beth El Farmworker Ministries, Program: Balm Wimauma Area Housing Partnership (BWAHP)

Beth-El Farmworker Ministry, Inc. helps farm workers and families in financial crisis deal with housing issues and barriers to achieve self-sufficiency through its many services provided to meet basic needs. BWAHP is the program that works with single parents.

Brunilda began working with a family that was referred to BWAHP by Healthy Start Program. Initially the mom was emotionally overwhelmed. Her boyfriend and the father of her children had moved back to Mexico leaving her with a two year old, a baby and pregnant with her third child. She went from being a pregnant homemaker to being abandoned. She then learned he had a wife and children in Mexico.

Mom was provided food from the pantry and diapers and she left feeling more secure. While there were limitations due to the pregnancy, over time Mom became very focused and determined that she wanted to improve her life. She wanted to begin to get positive results from the bad things that happened. Brunilda told her, "If you want to improve your life you are in the right place." Brunilda advised her that she could not afford where she was living and would need to find something cheaper. She was very good at following up on everything requested and found a mobile home. ASO funds were requested and utilized to pay for the mobile home's rent and to pay for electricity.

BWAHP continued to work with her to secure basic resources. She was referred to the Department of Children and Families and the Tampa Bay Workforce Alliance. She was approved for both food stamps and cash assistance. She also performed community service as a volunteer at one of the local RCMA Child Care Centers. She was referred to the Targeted Outreach for Pregnant Women Act (TOPWA) program as a high risk pregnancy client and TOPWA will provide high quality pre and post natal care for her and her baby. Contact was also maintained with the Healthy Start Program as they were already involved with the family.

Once this Mom felt better and more stable in the home, she was able to talk more calmly about her goals and thoughts about her future. She expressed her desire to attend school so BWAHP involved her with Hillsborough Community College, South Shore Campus and used ASO funding. She decided she was interested in taking the CNA course. She has just recently graduated and plans to continue her education

by attending the Phlebotomy course that HCC will offer soon at the Ruskin campus. Now at eight months pregnant, she will continue to study for the certification test. Once certified, she hopes to be able to get a job and DCF will help pay for childcare so she can work.

Brunilda said the lesson learned is that you realize that there are so many young women that need a little push from someone, some kind of support, to allow them to be successful. When you realize how one is so young to have so much happen in her life, it touches you. "I think WOW, how many people need an intervention and can get something special from that intervention. I like that and with ASO you can give them an opportunity, not restrictions. Families continue the cycle without opportunity."

The message Brunilda would give other Case Managers is sit down and spend some time with your clients. Try to establish that relationship. They will open up, tell you their dreams and what has gone on in their lives. Sometimes it can help you understand their behavior and that is the key. Brunilda shared that she worked 15 years as a supervisor for DCF. It was difficult when you are seen as the "bad guy" but if you come, not in judgment but in assistance, you can have an excellent experience. She said she has moved from the door closing in her face to having a relationship where they thanked her. It will not be easy the first time, but she said she cannot think of a family where she could say, "We didn't accomplish anything." Most families are grateful.