

# Sample Narrative Summary

## *Preparation for an Adjudicatory Hearing*

Adapted with permission from Mark Hardin, ABA Center on Children and the Law

### Data:

Children: Marissa Smith, age 2  
Joseph Smith (Joey), age 4

Mother: Alicia Smith, age 20

Biological father: Robert Hall, whereabouts unknown, but may be in Georgia

Hotline referral: August 11, this year

Emergency removal of children from the home: August 11, this year

Shelter care hearing, at which time court granted the agency temporary custody of the two children: August 12, this year

Adjudicatory hearing scheduled: September 12 this year

### Narrative

**Circumstances under which the children came into care:** Marissa and Joseph Smith were taken into protective custody on August 11 after being left alone by their mother, Alicia Smith. The agency received a call from a neighbor of the Smiths, who had observed the two Smith children, 4-year-old Joseph and 2-year-old Marissa, looking out of an upstairs bedroom window of their home. The referral source reported that the children lived in the home with their mother, Alicia Smith, but the reporter was concerned that the children might be alone.

The caseworker immediately went to the home, where she was met by the police. No one responded to knocks on the door. However, the caseworker saw two children looking down from a closed upstairs window. The caseworker and the police officer tried to enter the home through the front door, which was locked and dead bolted. They subsequently entered through

a side door and found Joseph and Marissa alone upstairs in a bedroom that was locked from the outside. There was no one else present in the home.

The children seemed frightened but unhurt, although Joey had a bump and a large purple bruise on his forehead above his right eye.

**Condition of the Home:** The home was very cluttered and dirty. Dirty dishes were stacked on the kitchen table and in the sink, and there was a strong, unpleasant odor in the kitchen. The toilet in the bathroom was clogged and not usable. There were papers and clothing strewn all over the house, which was sweltering hot and filled with flies. There was one jar of peanut butter and a quart of milk in the refrigerator, and a partial loaf of bread on the counter. Joseph and Marissa's only bed was a dirty, bare mattress lying on the floor in the upstairs bedroom in which they were found.

**Granting of Emergency Custody:** The Juvenile Court granted an emergency custody order by telephone, and the police officer transported the children to the emergency foster home. The caseworker followed in her vehicle.

A shelter care hearing (also sometimes known as a preliminary hearing) was held on August 12<sup>th</sup>. At that hearing the court granted the agency a temporary order of custody, ordered that Joseph and Marissa remain in foster care, and scheduled an adjudicatory hearing.

**First Contact with the Mother:** On the evening of August 13<sup>th</sup>, Ms. Smith called the agency frantic about the whereabouts and safety of her children. Ms. Smith indicated that she had left the children in the care of her fifteen-year-old girlfriend, Lanie, while she had traveled to Atlanta with a friend of hers who was delivering a load of furniture (he is a moving van driver). Ms. Smith insisted that the children be returned to her immediately since it was "not her fault" that Lanie had left them alone. The caseworker explained that the children would have to remain in foster care until the adjudicatory hearing, whereupon Ms. Smith became very angry and verbally abusive. She had no explanation for how the bump and bruise over Joey's eye may have occurred.

**Subsequent Contacts with the Mother:** The caseworker has scheduled four interviews with Ms. Smith since her first contact with her—three at her home and one at the agency. Ms. Smith failed to answer the door for one of the home visits. She insists that the caseworker came on the wrong day, but the caseworker had the date written down on the calendar and is sure there was no mistake. Ms. Smith also failed to show up for the interview that had been

scheduled at the agency. She says she had a doctor's appointment. In all, she is missed half of her scheduled appointments with the caseworker.

**Relative Search:** The caseworker contacted maternal grandmother who lives in Atlanta, Georgia. The daughter (Ms. Smith) and the two children lived there, together, until three months ago when Ms. Smith moved with the children to Ohio with a boyfriend (who has since deserted Ms. Smith). Maternal grandmother says she is unable to care for the children. Maternal great-aunt lives an hour away from Ms. Smith. She was contacted by the caseworker who left a message on her answering machine and sent her a letter asking her to call the agency. The great-aunt has not returned the caseworker's call or letter.

Alicia has told the caseworker that she and the children's father never married. He has never visited the children, nor paid child support, and his name is not on their birth certificates. The last she knew, he was living in their home town in Georgia. Due to this father's historical lack of involvement or support, the caseworker has not attempted to contact him, although she knows his name.

**Mother's Visits with Children:** The caseworker scheduled visits between the children and their mother. Ms. Smith has missed three of the nine visits scheduled during the four weeks since the shelter care hearing. On two occasions Ms. Smith called on the day of the visit to cancel. On the third she simply failed to show up. Joey and Marissa were extremely disappointed on each occasion.

During visits the children seem pleased to see their mother; however, Ms. Smith was not very affectionate with the children, and vice versa. The family played games and colored, and Ms. Smith sometimes read to the children. Ms. Smith has occasionally allowed Marissa to sit on her lap; however, the caseworker has not seen Ms. Smith kiss or hug either of the children. Ms. Smith cries when the visits are over, and it is time to say goodbye. Joey and Marissa also become tearful.

**Children's Condition:** The children's foster mother reports that Marissa becomes listless and withdrawn for several hours after visits with her mother, and that Joey becomes agitated and has nightmares in which he cries out for his mother. Although his mother reports that he is potty trained, Joey is now wetting himself during the day, as well as at night.

Both children have been seen by a physician and are reported to be in good health. However, the foster mother believes that Marissa seems underweight for her age and that this is the result of a lack of nutritious food. Joseph has a slight speech impediment. At age four he has

never attended preschool, and his social skills seem somewhat delayed. He has trouble sharing and, although he is protective of Marissa, he sometimes becomes aggressive with other children.

**Children's Adjustment in Foster Home:** Joey and Marissa are doing quite well in their foster home. They seem to be thriving under their foster mother's consistent and nurturing care. Their foster family has grown quite fond of the children. Marissa tends to cling to her foster mother, while Joey has formed a particularly close relationship with his foster father. They have enrolled Joey in preschool, where he is performing well academically.

**Current Condition of the Home:** Ms. Smith lives in a rented house with two bedrooms. Three weeks after the children were taken into custody little had been done to improve the dirty conditions inside the home. Some of the dirty dishes had been cleared away, but that was about it. The dirt, clutter, and unpleasant odors still remained. The toilet was still broken. Although the caseworker had spoken with Alicia during their first meeting about the need for her to ask the landlord to fix her broken toilet, Ms. Smith had not called him.

**Mother's Current Situation:** Alicia appears to be isolated and overwhelmed. Only 20 years old, she moved to this area from Atlanta three months ago with her two children and a boyfriend who is not the biological father of the children. He deserted her a month ago. She has no family or friends in the area. Her only family is her mother, who lives in Atlanta, and is unwilling or unable to assist Alicia or the children at this time. She has no employment and is illegally living on temporary assistance checks from Georgia, forwarded to her by her mother from Atlanta.