

Sarah's Story

Sarah is a bi-racial (mother is black and father is white) 15 year old who lives in a medium-sized city in a neighborhood that is primarily made up of apartments and low-income housing. At the time of the referral, she was living at home, but has a history of out-of-home placements.

She is a special education student due to learning disabilities. She is currently on a restricted schedule because of her behavior. She is argumentative, rude, and non-compliant with teachers. Although she has never been assaultive, she has overturned desks and thrown her books when frustrated. She has a history of stealing items from other students. Her former guidance counselor has been an advocate for her and sees a lot of Sarah's good traits. She is currently reading at below grade level and in danger of failing 9th grade.

Sarah is under juvenile court supervision for one year due to multiple serious thefts from businesses and from other youth, but is due to be released from probation in about two months.

She also suffers from epilepsy and has daily seizures if she does not take her medication. Unfortunately, she is in denial about the epilepsy and will rarely take her medications voluntarily. Sarah's father cares about her but lives in another city, is remarried, and is not very attentive to Sarah. His new wife is pregnant and is uncomfortable with Sarah being bi-racial. Her mother was married before, and Sarah has two older half brothers who are both out of the home. Her 18-year-old brother was also served by mental health, but is now living with friends who are drug users in another city. Her 25-year-old brother is a resource for her. He is an aide in a nursing home and has over two years of sobriety from alcohol addiction.

Sarah has several close friends from the street with whom she has maintained a relationship for several years, even when she was in placement or detention. Sarah's mother is very angry at "the system" and feels that no one ever listens to her or understands just how hard it is to deal with Sarah. Sarah's mother is currently seeking employment after leaving a position in a beauty parlor as a hair stylist. She has worked sporadically but has had on-going difficulty with transportation and has found it difficult to get to and from work. She is frustrated with Sarah, but committed to trying whatever it takes to make things work at home this time.

Sarah's involvement with mental health has been erratic. She has had a number of therapists and been involved with various groups at the Center. However, she has not maintained regular contact. Recently, she was assigned a new therapist Coordinator, Janis Jones, and seems to like her so far. There have been several people involved in Sarah's life: Sandra, her guidance counselor; Chuck, her 25-year-old brother; Ms. Cagle, her special education teacher; a neighborhood YMCA volunteer who knows the family well due to her support of Chuck's entry into a 12-step group; and Alice, another teen whom Sarah met while in the acute inpatient facility.

Sarah's Strengths

- Sarah is bright and creative and is good with her hands.
- She cares about animals and has a pet cat that is well behaved.
- She can hold long-term friendships.
- She is in good physical condition, despite being very sexually active, and has not become pregnant.
- She has shown that she can do well in school when she applies herself.
- When she was in placement outside the home, she was a frequent runner, but she always ran to home.
- She has avoided use of hard drugs, even when her peers have pressured her.

- Sarah thinks that she would be a good therapist and believes that she could be a good listener to kids with problems.
- She has adults whom she respects.
- She is not afraid to speak up and defend her “turf.”
- She enjoys music.

Family and Community Strengths

- Sarah has a devoted mother who has gotten off public support by going to trade school.
- Her 25-year-old brother is involved in her life, has a job, and has over two years of sobriety.
- Her father acknowledges her and cares about her even though he is not involved.
- Her family lives in a safe home.
- Her family is actively involved in the neighborhood YMCA and knows the staff there.
- The Salvation Army Central Youth Shelter has worked with Sarah’s family and is committed to continuing to work with them.
- A Salvation Army worker and her former school counselor have continued to advocate for her being able to go to the school in her neighborhood.
- Sarah has a new therapist with whom she is developing a positive relationship.

Questions to identify Wraparound-Guiding Principles:

1. **Does the System offer a wide range of services and supports to address Sarah’s needs? How could the System offer a wide range of services?**
2. **Are the services offered based on the strengths of Sarah and her family? How could services be offered based on the strengths of Sarah and her family?**
3. **Are services offered to help keep Sarah in her home? What services will ensure that?**
4. **How do all of the service providers and other supports partner with Sarah’s family to address her needs?**
5. **Are there needs that Sarah has that are not being addressed by the current services (including the need for coordination of services)?**
6. **What cultural issues does the System need to ensure are addressed?**
7. **What, if anything, will the System need to do to address Sarah’s independent living needs?**
8. **How will the team help Sarah and her family learn to advocate for their own needs and to secure needed services?**

Questions to consider when identifying needed skills and developing “lesson plans”:

1. **What resources are available to you?**
2. **What skills would be most beneficial to begin working on?**
3. **Explain an activity that would help to address a skill.**
4. **Explain an activity that can help reinforce the identified strengths/protective factors.**