



## **The Family Example Used in The Vroon VanDenBerg High Fidelity Wraparound 101 Training:**

We will use “Debbie and her family” – a fictional family based on the work of VVDB coaches and trainers – for many of the remaining exercises and behavioral rehearsals in the training you will attend. The new VVDB DVD is based on this family. Please individually read the following description of the family, and underline or highlight any aspects of the family which make your experienced system antenna go up. Highlight or underline any information about the family which you feel may lead to positive or negative outcomes for the family. During the training, you may ask VVDB staff for clarifying information about the family as needed. For now, write down any questions you would like to ask at the training.

### **Family Overview**

Debbie is a 33 year old mother of two children, Susanna, age 8, and Joaquin, age 15. Susanna was taken into child welfare custody and placed in foster care about nine months ago. Joaquin has been in Juvenile Justice custody in a local detention center for over a year. He had received an indeterminate sentence for breaking and entering and marijuana use, fighting at a very aggressive and dangerous level, and until recently has had difficulty stabilizing in the detention center. Recently, with better behavior, he is due to be released in 30 days. Debbie is divorced from Susanna and Joaquin’s father, Ernesto.

Ernesto has refused to participate in the child welfare case plan for Susanna or the development of the juvenile justice plan for Joaquin. He says he does not want to be the primary parent of the children since he is now living with his girlfriend, Flavia. Flavia and Ernesto are expecting a child of their own who is due in 6 months. Ernesto has maintained visits with Susanna since he and Debbie divorced, although the visits have become sporadic since she was placed in foster care. He has never visited Joaquin at the detention center, as he felt that Joaquin had violated his trust. Previous to Joaquin’s incarceration, Ernesto and Joaquin were fairly close. Ernesto blames Debbie for most of the problems with the children.

Child welfare became involved with the family three years ago after a police report of domestic violence in the home. A neighbor, who made the 911 call, believed someone was being harmed when she heard shouting, cursing and screaming coming from the home of Ernesto and Debbie. The responding police officers found Ernesto and Debbie in a physical altercation and found Debbie to be the primary aggressor. She had bloodied Ernesto's nose and was wildly out of control. Though Ernesto refused to press charges, the officers were able to restore what they feared was a temporary peace by threatening to arrest Debbie for disturbing the peace.

The police officers were concerned about the safety of Susanna and Joaquin. They observed that the children seemed numbed to the domestic violence, and looked unkempt and listless. Based on these concerns, the officers made a report to child welfare who conducted an investigation. No child abuse was substantiated but the parents were referred to domestic violence counseling. Ernesto and Debbie choose not to pursue the counseling referral.

A few months later, child welfare received a child abuse report from Susanna's school teacher after Susanna arrived for school dirty, unfed, and with bruises. Child welfare investigated and determined that the children were not receiving adequate protection, supervision, or appropriate discipline. Joaquin was out late at night with older friends, and neither parent seemed to care or be concerned. There was also suspicion that Ernesto and Debbie were abusing alcohol. The abuse report was substantiated and a family preservation team was dispatched. The family preservation team was involved with the family for three months with an emphasis on parenting education.

When family preservation terminated their involvement, the preservation team recommended that Debbie and Ernesto continue in outpatient therapy and that Ernesto seek treatment for alcoholism. Ernesto and Debbie choose not to make any further therapy appointments. Ernesto was of the opinion that they had had enough therapy and he preferred to have people out of his business. He stated that he was not an alcoholic and that he did not need treatment.

Grace, the child welfare worker, warned the parents that if they continued to fail to comply with the outpatient therapy element in their case plan, the court might order the removal of the children and their placement in foster care. Fearing the removal of her children, Debbie kicked Ernesto out of the home and followed through on the referral for individual therapy for herself and the children at the local mental health center. Ernesto and Debbie divorced shortly thereafter.

During this same time period, Debbie got a job as a stocker at a local grocery store and maintained steady employment over the next year. Grace and her

supervisor thought sufficient progress had been made and that the situation was stable, so the family's case was closed.

About six months later, another referral was made to child protective services by the school. This time the school reported that Susanna arrived at school dirty, hadn't been fed breakfast, and was showing increasing aggression toward her teacher and peers. In addition, child welfare checked with the school social worker at Joaquin's school and found that Joaquin was often truant and that he was in frequently in trouble over thefts from other children. Susanna told her teacher that she and her mother were fighting a lot at home and that sometimes "Mom sits on me 'til I settle down and it hurts me." Another investigation was conducted. Debbie told the child welfare investigator that Susanna had frequent tantrums that she couldn't manage, and that she had given up trying to control Joaquin. About this time, Joaquin was arrested for the third time for breaking and entering and possession of marijuana. The court placed him in detention for probation violations, including not completing his restitution even with the best efforts of his experienced probation officer, Robert. Child welfare initiated a dependency action on Susanna and placed her with a single foster mother, Delta Smith. The current case has been open with child welfare for approximately nine months.

Child welfare is hoping for family reunification but has a concurrent plan for a permanent guardianship of Susanna and Joaquin by Edith, Debbie's mother, or termination and adoption if there is not rapid and sustained progress toward the goals in the family case plan.

Debbie has been diagnosed with a bipolar disorder. In addition to her individual therapy, she has received medication management from a psychiatrist. Debbie has become increasingly inconsistent in keeping her individual therapy appointments and taking her medication. Without meds, her mood swings are extreme, and she is more likely to be loud, obnoxious, and sometimes violent. Her therapy attendance is better when she stays on her medicine. Debbie has participated in parenting classes and received instruction on housekeeping but changes do not hold over time.

Susanna has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Oppositional Defiant Disorder. Educational testing revealed significant learning disabilities. Susanna's individual therapist is working on helping her to learn to control her frustrations and aggressive impulses. He is teaching her anger management techniques that she uses at the foster home, is learning to use at school, and hopefully will use in the home. Susanna is taking stimulant medication to help with her impulsivity and trouble concentrating, and has been placed in special education for her learning disabilities and behavior problems.

Joaquin's probation officer, Robert, and Grace, the family child welfare worker, are reluctant to see Joaquin come back to the current home situation without quick remedial action by Debbie, and Joaquin should be placed in a local group home after release from detention. Debbie wants Joaquin to come home but says that he must make some changes and "Toe the line 100%" or he will be sent to live with Ernesto. Ernesto has refused to let Joaquin live with he and Flavia. Joaquin says he wants to live with his mother.

Grace is afraid there may be an impending crisis. Yesterday, she and Debbie were making arrangements during a phone conversation for Debbie to visit for two hours this Saturday at the foster home during Susanna's birthday party. Debbie said she promised Susanna that she would take her out so she could choose a new bike as her birthday present. Grace told Debbie this wouldn't be possible since her visits with Susanna are supervised by court order and that arrangements for off-site supervision could not be made on such short notice. Grace said Debbie became agitated, threatened to show up and take Susanna anyway "because I always keep my promises so nobody better try to stop me", and then abruptly hung up the phone. Grace has tried to reconnect with Debbie both at home and at her work number but has been unsuccessful. Unless the situation is defused, Grace is very concerned there may be a serious confrontation at the foster home and fears this would be harmful to the emotional well-being of her daughter.

The court has been putting increasing pressure on Juvenile Justice authorities to "get tough" with repeat offender juveniles. In recent years, the courts have been especially tough on young offenders who re-offend, show up in court, and have not done previously court ordered restitution. Robert, Joaquin's probation officer has been unable to get Joaquin to understand that if he re-offends after release from detention, he could easily end up sentenced to custody until he is 19 or 20 years old. Robert has worked with Joaquin to plan to do his court ordered restitution which had gone undone prior to Joaquin being incarcerated. Robert has said that talking to Joaquin is like talking to a wall. Robert's experience tells him that Joaquin is just giving lip service to doing the restitution and that once released, it will be like pulling teeth to get the restitution done. Robert's experience with similar youth tells him that there is at least a 75% chance that Joaquin will re-offend, and that with no restitution completed, even a minor violation of probation will result in a long sentence.