

Shannon's Story

Shannon is the fourth child born to Caterina. Shannon's oldest half-siblings, two sisters, who are each more than ten years older than Shannon, are in the custody of their father in another state. The remaining half-sibling, a boy, lives locally with his father and spends weekends with Caterina as outlined in their joint custody agreement.

Shannon was removed from Caterina's custody when she was one and a half years old because Caterina was arrested for driving while intoxicated with Shannon in the car. Shannon was placed in foster care with Nathan and Marie, a couple with no other children.

Shannon remained in foster care with Nathan and Marie for ten months while Caterina engaged in treatment for alcohol use disorder. During this time Caterina successfully completed treatment at a facility and at a halfway house. Upon leaving the halfway house, she secured a centrally located two-bedroom apartment and reported consistent attendance at 12-step meetings. She engaged in therapy, secured a mentor through a women's mentoring program and attended training in medical records management and was able to secure employment.

Communication with Nathan and Marie was frequent and supportive. Nathan and Marie rallied their church to help furnish Caterina's apartment and, with the permission of Shannon's caseworker, often picked Caterina up on Sundays so that she could attend church with them and Shannon. Visits with Shannon, at first brief and supervised, increased to unsupervised overnight and weekend visits. When she was almost two and a half years old, Shannon was returned to Caterina's custody.

In the year that followed, Caterina enrolled Shannon in preschool and continued to report regular attendance at 12-step meetings. Caterina maintained a relationship with Nathan and Marie. Shannon often spent Sundays with them and even joined them on an out-of-state vacation to visit Marie's family.

After almost a year and a half, Caterina relapsed binge drinking at her apartment with a friend while Shannon was present. Caterina's friend called 911 and Caterina was transported to the emergency room for alcohol poisoning. Caterina called Nathan and Marie from the hospital. They picked up Shannon.

Shannon was placed with Nathan and Marie once again. In the six months that followed, Caterina struggled to find employment after losing her job during her relapse. She continues to live in the same apartment as she searches for new employment. Supervised visits with Shannon started almost immediately after her return to Nathan and Marie's home and have continued. Communication between Caterina and Nathan and Marie is more limited and guarded.

Shannon is now four years old. Nathan and Marie are willing to adopt. The case plan goal for Shannon remains return to parent/family reunification, but all involved are unsure as to how to proceed and what is in Shannon's best interest. Should she return to Caterina or should Caterina's parental rights be terminated so that Nathan and Marie can adopt? What do you think?

A dilemma that often arises is the conflict between the legal mandate (and the child's need) for permanence which guide the legal timeframes for dependency cases (ASFA) and the long-term treatment (including inpatient treatment) that parents with substance use disorders may need.