

* Please note: All names have been changed to protect privacy

Story #1

This story of family success and team collaboration centres on the Johnston family. The family includes Sarah (the mother), Rob (the father), and three children under age 9.

The following core staff made up the team working with the family: Ubuntu Family Support Worker (FSW), Ubuntu Home Support Worker (HSW), Ubuntu Manager, Child and Family Services Caseworker, Child and Family Services Supervisor, Multicultural Health Broker(MCHB) as Sarah, the mother, is Somalian.

In addition, Alberta Works became an important member of the team, as did the Alberta Somalian Association, the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, as well as the Boyle Street Housing department.

Like many of the families Ubuntu serves, the Johnston family had come to the attention of the North East Child and Family Services (NECFS) office due to family violence. Additionally, there had been accusations that mom had been leaving the children alone in the home, and that she physically disciplined the children. Mom was not able to trust the team due to fears of her tight knit cultural community finding out about her family's involvement with NECFS, and was therefore apt to hiding the reality of the family violence and abuse she endured with Rob on a daily basis.

The severity of Rob's mental health, his violent behaviour towards Sarah, and heightened paranoia, presented many complications for progress. Rob has also had multiple incarcerations, a lengthy drug history, and was struggling with living in poverty.

When the team first met the family, Rob and Sarah were still living with one another. With support from the team, Sarah made the decision to move out in order to escape the abuse, and Alberta works supported Sarah and the kids by placing them in a hotel. Both parent's continued to share custody of the three children however.

During this time there were many accusations about Sarah's behaviour which led to the team not always feeling absolutely confident that the children were safe in her care. Additionally, Rob's deteriorating mental health, increasing paranoia, and troublesome threats increased the team's worries about the safety of the children while in his care. It was clear that Sarah wanted to keep herself away from Rob, but being that she had very few natural supports, she found it difficult to avoid accepting his help with the kids.

Possible apprehension of the children was on the table for consideration multiple times, but through collaborative efforts using Signs of Safety mapping, scaling questions, and many conversations, the service team, together with Sarah and Rob, were able to keep apprehension at bay.

At one point, the worries for the children's safety was so heightened the team presented Sarah with the option of working with her community to build safety. Sarah, with help from the Alberta Somalian Community, found a trusted Somalian community member who agreed to allow the children and Sarah to stay in her home so that NECFS, Ubuntu, and the MCHB would know that the safety plan was being followed, while also ensuring that mom and the children could stay together. During this time, Ubuntu helped to ensure that the children were able to attend their same school, and continued to facilitate supervised family time between Rob and the children several times per week.

For the next month, Sarah was able to demonstrate her ability to keep her children safe while living with the Somalian community member; however, Rob's mental health was so extreme that it became harmful for the children to spend time with him. Because he legally shared custody with Sarah, NECFS, Ubuntu, and the MCHB's decided that the only way that the kids could be safe from Rob's emotionally abusive outbursts was to apprehend the children, and place them with their mom.

The team helped to facilitate a meeting between Sarah and Alberta Works and after sharing more of her story with Alberta Works, Sarah was approved for an increase to accommodate the cost of rent in a Somali Community Transition home. Soon after, the team connected with the Boyle Street Housing department, and were able to find Sarah an affordable unit in the agency's apartment building. The Alberta Somalian Association helped to find furniture through their community networks, and the Boyle Street Moving Company helped to deliver the furniture to Sarah's new apartment.

It was through these actions, and many smaller un-named actions that Sarah's trust with the team grew. She eventually opened up, and felt comfortable enough to tell the team that she was struggling with her finances, her past trauma due to the abusive relationship, and with her parenting. An Ubuntu Home Support Worker was brought onto the team to spend regular time with Sarah in the evenings to help her grow her confidence and enhance her parenting skills, budgeting ability, and to ensure that she could attend appointments that were related to the health and wellness of herself and the children. Sarah noticeably became the "driver" of her own vision for her family.

It was also during this time that Sarah was granted full custody of the children, something that brought great comfort to Sarah, as she had expressed many times that she felt it would be in the best interest of the children if there were strict boundaries regarding Rob's access.

Sarah participated in several activities which helped her recognize the impact that the many years of violence in the home would have had on the children, one such example being the act of creating "Words and Pictures" – a Signs of Safety tool -- with the team. Additionally, Ubuntu was able to connect Sarah and her kids with culturally appropriate counselling services, and with help from the service team, she began taking the children to the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for play therapy sessions that can continue long after CFS involvement concludes.

Despite the severity of Rob's mental health concerns and that he no longer has custody or access to the children, he continues to visit the Ubuntu office on a regular basis, and asks for

support in varying degrees from his original FSW with whom he has been working with for a year now. A value statement at Boyle Street is that we stand with our community members, side by side, patiently and for as long as they want – a constant and consistent caring force. Continuing to work with Rob is a demonstration of this value.

Two months ago, Sarah re-signed a voluntary Family Enhancement Agreement with the team, feeling that she could use more support to develop her parenting and life skills – an incredible action given her mistrust and reluctance to work with the team one year prior.

There have been multiple times where Ubuntu, NECFS and MCHB's have been confused and frustrated by the complexities of working with this family. Through constant and clear communication amongst one another, collaborative efforts have become an everyday affair. This team has learned to lean on one another, utilize one another's strengths, and has shown the family that no matter what, we don't give up on them.

Story #2

Maddie came to Children Services (CS) attention at age 11, due to her out of control and high risk behaviors as the RCMP and her parents consistently requested supports to keep everyone safe over a two and a half year period. Maddie was secured in care at Yellow Head Youth Centre under a Custody Agreement to the risks she posed to self and others. Prior to Collaborative Service Delivery (CSD) involvement, the practice was not embracing Signs of Safety and Practice Strategies and the mindset was to keep her out of the home as nothing else seemed to work. She was continually causing her siblings who were young, and one being autistic, to be at risk in the home due to her aggression, property destruction and mental health concerns. This was considered a legacy file however the CS staff discussed the option of Unlimited Potential Community Service's CSD Bridges Program becoming involved due to the complex needs of the youth, and the need to perhaps try something more creative and wrapping around a huge service team of professionals and familial supports.

A variety of approaches and interventions were tried with Maddie to keep her safe and address her high needs. Maddie continued to place herself at risk and was placed in Secure Treatment a few times due to extreme drug use, sexual exploitation and running away, placing herself into dangerous situations. There were several PCHAD Orders and out of home Family Services for Children with Disability(FSCD) placements in Edmonton and Regina , where she disappeared twice in Saskatchewan for days at a time. She was eventually located in other cities, sometimes being held against her will and exploited. She had one mental health confinement at Regina General Hospital and then went to a youth detox and treatment facility in Saskatoon. CS and CSD Bridges worked hard to support the family with a multi-disciplined team and wrap around supports based on what the family needed. The focus was stabilizing Maddie so her mental health could be addressed while repairing and strengthening the relationship between mother and daughter, thus reconnecting Maddie with her family and her main support.

One and a half years after starting working with Maddie, she is now at home and has been for three months with no critical incidents. CS status is a Family Enhancement Agreement with

Guardian. CSD Bridges and CS continue to collaborate regularly with a shared vision of what we are, and are not responsible for as we impress upon the guardian her role in this and to steer the ship with decisions and planning. Both the CS and Bridges CSD Managers arrange and attend large meetings to review progress, next steps, and impress upon the Mental Health Managers who attend from Alberta Health Services that they are an important part of the youth's needs being met. Her mother comes to every meeting and willingly participates in discussions on creative options. FSCD offers extended supports and a contracted youth worker with a specialization in serving High Risk Youth and their family. Regular consultation and involvement with a CS High Risk Youth Specialist, we are now seeing a youth who is living at home in Spruce Grove with the support of her family. Maddie is committed to her sobriety and being seen regularly by her psychiatrist in St Albert and gets proper medication that is helping her stay calm, focused and logical. CS and Bridges CSD have advised the service team and family, including Maddie who comes to our meetings that we are closing in less than a month. There is no intervention concerns under the Child, Youth Family Enhancement Act and the community, professional and familial supports and safety planning have wrapped around the youth for the greater good.

This is a definite joint success story for Unlimited Potential Community Services CSD Bridges Program and Spruce Grove CS – our staff have used Signs of Safety mapping; concrete safety planning while also collaborating in an intentional and purposeful way with this family. We allowed the family to guide decisions and the guardian to be empowered with gentle suggestions from CS. All professionals took part and had a role in responsibilities that in the past seemed to be all on the shoulder of CS staff.

When we reflect on this situation from where this was to where we are today, we see genuine efforts in practice in relation to the CIPF Principals of connection, collaboration, family preservation and strength based planning. Maddie is now 14 years old, this has been a three year journey from legacy file to CSD close.

Due to Maddie's mental health issues, her high risk behaviours, and their escalation at such a young age, the team was worried that Maddie would tragically lose her life, despite all the efforts being made to keep her safe and stable.....it was that grave of a situation for so long. It is powerful to see what can be done, when everyone comes together to support a youth and her family. The person who deserves the most credit is the mom – she really did stay with us every step of the way; found her voice to advocate for her child; realized her responsibility to her daughter and that the connection a mother and daughter share runs deep and this was the catalyst to getting Maddie home.

Story #3

Heather is an 18 year old young lady whom has been receiving services under Collaborative Service Delivery (CSD) for 6 years. For the duration of her time with CSD and The Family Centre (TFC), she has had the same Youth Intervention Specialist (YIS) supporting her as the primary TFC team member. Heather's mother, an Inuit woman from Rankin Inlet, made the decision to give Heather up for adoption as a baby, feeling she was unable to care for a new born at that time. She chose a family of Caucasian heritage, to raise her. Shortly after Heather's birth her adoptive family moved back to Edmonton, and was unable to honour their commitment to continue a relationship with her birth family and culture. As she aged, Heather began displaying increasingly difficult behaviours, ultimately resulting in a diagnosis of Reactive Attachment

Disorder. Heather's adoptive parents came to Children and Family Services (CFS) when she was 13 indicating they could no longer handle her behaviors.

The Foster parents struggled with Heather's behavior finding it difficult to interpret and understand. Heather's feelings of abandonment and the effects of her trauma often exhibited itself through self-destructive behavior such as drug and alcohol use, gang activity, and prostitution. As Heather became a young adolescent she began exploring her heritage and need for connection, she often ran away to a local First Nations Reserve as she felt a connection to the culture there. Although her adoptive father tried to be supportive of Heather he lacked the capacity to understand the effects of trauma and often blamed her for her short comings ultimately denying her a relationship with him and severing their ties.

At this time Heather's feelings of hopelessness and abandonment compounded, and she went through multiple unsuccessful placements. To cope with her pain Heather had turned increasingly to drugs and has engaged in high risk behaviour. Heather has many strengths, she is intelligent, musically gifted and has a great sense of humour, but all this was being lost as she attempted to find a sense of belonging, and unfortunately fulfilled this need with group of people who were also struggling.

When Heather was 15 years old, she began residing in one of TFC's Youth Reunification Homes. It was a rocky beginning, as she did not spend any time at the home for the first month of her placement there. Due to the structure of this service, we were able to keep her bed open, though she was not staying in the home. Over time she came to see this as her home, developed strong relationship with the staff, and resided there for two years.

Once she was stable in her new home, Heather began to discuss feelings of wanting to know her biological family and her cultural identity. As a team we were able to locate her biological mother, as well as many other extended family members in Nunavut. Heather's family were excited at the prospect of being reunited. Heather was excited too, but also very nervous, and wavered on her feelings regarding this for many months. The Family Centre arranged for Heather's mother to come to Edmonton to have a visit. This was a huge success and at this time plans were made to proceed with a Family Group Conference (FGC) in Rankin Inlet where Hannah could reconnect with her extended family, see her community, and get to know her cultural.

After much planning and coordination, Heather, her FIG, Caseworker and FGC Facilitator traveled to Rankin Inlet. Additionally Heather's adoptive father joined to lend support for Heather. Heather had the opportunity to meet several Aunties, Uncles, Cousins, and other extended family members. Additionally her brother, sister and niece were flown in from another northern community to meet Heather. The family was able to stay together in a hotel, and had many opportunities to connect and share.

During the actual Family Group Conference Heather was given an oral history of her culture and family by her Aunt, the family matriarch, who dressed in traditional clothing. Her sister and cousin performed throat singing for her. It was an incredibly emotional day where everyone committed to be more involved with and supportive of Heather. Plans were made for her to have an

extended visit at some point. The day marked the beginning of healing and forgiveness for many of the people present.

Heather left Rankin Inlet with a different "lightness", with joy in her eyes. She indicated she now knew where she comes from, her people. She learned her Inuit name; she felt like she belonged. Heather indicated she didn't want to go back to Edmonton and couldn't wait to return for a visit. Her family echoed the same sentiments and were so grateful for this opportunity. Heather also was able to make a reconnection with her adoptive father and will be working towards a healthier supportive relationship with his family. This opportunity provided Heather, and her family, some much needed hope for a brighter future.

Though there were some continued challenges for Heather regarding her high risk behaviours, she continued to engage with her support team at TFC and CFS. Heather became pregnant and at seventeen gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. At that time, Heather and the twins were moved to a Chimo home to support her in her new role as a parent. Unfortunately that placement was not successful for Heather, as she was not in the right place in her life to actively parent her children. The twins went into foster care and received their own Family Intervention Generalist (FIG) from TFC. Heather and the twins were able to continue to have regular visits, which were supported by a Parental Support Worker (PSW). Together they were able to focus on basic parenting skills, child development, attachment and relationship building.

At that time the team once again reached out the family in Nunavut and work began to have the twins move there to be cared for by one of Heather's Aunties. Her Auntie was brought to Edmonton to visit on two occasions, and though it was a long and complicated process, in May 2017, the twins at 16 months old went to live with family in Nunavut. Heather was able to accompany them there along with their Caseworker to have a family visit as well. The hope is that Heather will have more opportunities to connect to her family and community in the future, and that she will have a relationship with her children.

It is through the flexibility and creativity inherent within the CSD framework that the collaborative CFS/TFC team was able to work with Heather and her family, navigating many complex challenges and creating outcomes that the family has deemed as successful.