



MEET SIERA

BACKGROUND

Siera came to the United States to be reunited with her mother, Aida. Siera reported to a friend that her stepfather had been touching her in sexual way making her very uncomfortable. Siera's friend reported the information to her parents who contacted the police. After interviews with the Dover Police and DCP&P, Siera was removed from her home and stayed temporarily with a resource home in Dover. She was relocated to a resource home in Palisades Park and lived with a non-relative resource parent. Siera has no contact with her biological father, who lives in Colombia, South America.



OUTCOME

CASA volunteer Jean did an amazing job building a strong relationship with Siera. Initially, Siera was reserved and guarded. Jean spoke with Siera in Spanish, Siera's native language and her preference. This made Siera more comfortable with Jean and helped build their relationship. As Jean continued to visit Siera, Siera began to soften and their relationship began to grow. Siera's experience with her stepfather was traumatizing. Just as troubling to Siera was her mother's initial reaction of disbelief.

Siera wanted deeply to be reunited with her mother. **She felt alone and worried about DCP&P and the Court's involvement. Both Siera and her mother are undocumented and the attention of DCP&P and the Court was frightening.** She missed her mother very much.

Siera's mother, Aida, separated from her husband, moved into a boarding house and began working full time at a bodega. **The court worked quickly and reunited mother and daughter once they both were involved in therapy and Siera was comfortable to return to her mother's care.**

Aida worked 6-7 days a week, until 9 in the evening. After school, Siera went to the bodega. She did her homework and waited for her mother to finish work. Trauma left her reluctant to be separated from Aida and she had little desire to do anything after school except to be with her.

Because Jean and Siera's relationship had grown strong, Siera was comfortable being with Jean.

Aida sensed the love and support Jean was giving Siera and soon Jean and Aida worked as a team.

Aida was grateful for the time, support, and compassion Jean gave them. Jean gathered information from Siera's school as well as the Dover community. She told Aida about the academic options and available community activities. Together, Aida and Jean formed a school and community plan which would benefit Siera, including dance classes that CASA paid for. Jean recommended DCP&P pay for a membership at the local YMCA, as well as a bus pass for Siera. Both requests were granted. CASA was fortunate to receive a donation of ballet tickets at Lincoln Center in NYC. Jean and Siera took advantage of the opportunity to see the ballet, Don Quixote, and enjoyed an afternoon in the city through CASA's funding. Siera loved the experience. Aida was both grateful and happy Siera had this wonderful experience!

Jean assisted Aida to obtain an immigration attorney, but she is not confident in the process and often talks to Jean about her concerns. Jean listens to Aida's apprehensions and encourages her to contact her attorney for advice and additional information. **Jean has also assisted the process, along with DCP&P, to get Siera on the path to citizenship through the Rutgers Law Center.**

The boarding house Aida moved into after she left her husband was on the border of two different school districts. **Jean learned from Aida that Siera would need to transfer to another High School in the fall. Jean reached out to the new school's guidance counselor and obtained important information on 'new student' school tours and school activities which would interest Siera.** Before school started, Jean took Siera 'shopping' in "CASA's closets". Siera was able to get a backpack and school supplies. Jean also took Siera on a 'Back-to-School' clothes shopping trip with gift cards from CASA! And, as the weather became cooler, Jean took Siera on another shopping trip to buy a winter jacket.

After the litigation was closed in August, the Division and CASA monitored the case to make sure Siera settled into her new school. Siera acclimated well to her new school. She is very bright and plans to be an orthodontist. The Division closed the case at the end of October. **Although CASA also closed the case in October, Jean continues to communicate with Siera and Aida, who both welcome the continued contact and relationship.**