

St. Vincent's Center helps one girl gain a family

Ever since she was a baby, her mother beat her. Involved with drugs, her mother would leave her unattended, even as an infant and toddler. Sometimes she took the child to bars. She was just 9 when her mother was imprisoned for beating her. Her biological father was dead.

But her half-brother Dave, who had been raised by a different mother and was 22 at the time, took her in. But she screamed all night long. Every time Dave and his then-fiancé, Megan, tried to sleep, the girl would scream hysterically.

And when her mother got out of prison, she wanted to regain custody, despite Dave's attempts to adopt the girl.

"Things started to get out of control," said Megan. "She was screaming and crying all night long. She was terrified her mom would come and take her. She thought if we were asleep her mom would take her and we wouldn't know it. We didn't know this at the time - it came out in individual and group therapy at St. Vincent's."

Since the couple didn't yet have full custody, the Department of Social Services stepped in and placed the child, whose name is not being used to protect her privacy, at St. Vincent's Center. To protect her privacy, the names of her family have been changed.

During her seven months in therapy there, the child articulated her fears. She even confronted her mother in a supervised visit and told her that she didn't want anything to do with her, and that she would contact her mother if she felt the need to see her. She also did weekend visits with Dave and Megan.

The goal of St. Vincent's Center, said Mary G. Rode, administrator, is to reunify children with their families as quickly as possible - if it's safe.

"If kids can stay safely in homes, that's where they should be," Ms. Rode said. Most children stay about 13 months, she said, and the families are involved in the

treatment, working alongside staff to learn techniques to help them deal with the issues involved.

Since May, the girl, now 11, has been living with Dave and Megan, who are married and have legally adopted her. She attends her local school and continues with therapy.

“It’s awesome – we’ve had no problems,” Megan said. She worked closely with the therapists at St. Vincent’s Center “and they would give us some ideas of how to help her.” She’s learned that the child thrives on routine and a predictable schedule.

Megan and Dave credit the time at St. Vincent’s Center for helping the girl. “We would never be where we are today without her going there,” Megan said.

Talking with other kids from similar situations helped her immensely, and the child realized she was actually one of the lucky ones – she had family willing to take her.

“Talking with other kids, she’s learned it’s not bad to feel the way she does,” Megan said. “She’s been through a lot for such a little kid.”