

# The Nita Case Study Activity



**Purpose:** Become more proficient in developing a CASA Action Plan and making appropriate youth-focused, strength-based court recommendations.

**Content:** This section of the curriculum is comprised a detailed case study that addresses issues related to youth who are aging out of foster care.

**Use:** To facilitate in-class discussions and activities around the impact CASA/GAL volunteers have in improving the outcomes of youth who age out of foster care.

In this case study you will be introduced to an adolescent named Nita. View this case study through the lens of the CASA/GAL volunteer. Apply the knowledge and skills you have learned from your training. The goal of this activity is to identify the needs and/or issues, make appropriate recommendations, and locate community resources. When working with youth the idea is to involve the youth in as many discussions as possible and empower him or her to contribute to the discussion. Oftentimes, discussions are conducted above the youth with the end result being that he or she must do something without any input—remember the Great Debate activity? Also, the Possible Selves Model is a great tool to use when trying to shift the adolescents focus from his or her immediate needs to his or her future needs.

## Activity 7A: Case Study Review

### Nita's Story

#### Background Information:

Nita is a 17-year old junior in high school. She is African American. Nita and her little sister were removed from their birth mother's home when Nita was 11 and her sister was 3 years old. They were brought into care for child neglect. Nina frequently missed school and when she was at school it appeared that the only meal she was receiving was the free school lunch. When the referral was made to Child Protective Services (CPS), authorities found both girls at home, alone, in a very disorderly house with little food. The two girls were placed in separate foster homes because social services was unable to find a same placement for both girls. The girls were placed in foster care for two days before their mother came home. A drug test was administered to the birth mother and it was discovered that she had an addiction to methamphetamine. The birth mother also had a history of checking into and prematurely checking out of rehabilitation centers.

Nita does not have the same biological father as her sister. Neither father has any involvement in either of their lives. Legal paternity has never been established for either child either. The courts determined that reasonable efforts were made to locate each father prior to placing the girls in out-of-home care. Neither father was ever located.

Two years ago the biological mother's parental rights were terminated. Neither girl has had any contact with her since the Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) ruling. Nita has remained in close contact with her sister; however, they have never lived together in the same home. Nita visits her sister several times a month as she feels it is her responsibility to take care of her.

Nita's original plan included permanency in the form of adoption. There was one attempt at adoption; however, it was disrupted. No other opportunities for adoption have ever transpired.

Nita's younger sister has been in the same home since being removed from her birth mother. She was legally adopted by her foster family, Kim and Chester Robinson one year ago. Kim and Chester are both African American.

Nita's younger sister was also provided a CASA/GAL volunteer from the time she was removed from her birth mother until the adoption was finalized. Due to volunteer shortages, the court was unable to assign a CASA/GAL volunteer to Nita until now.

#### First visit:

During your first visit with Nita you discussed your role with her and her situation. Your visit lasted about 45 minutes. Nita talked a little bit about school. Nita is getting close to graduation; however she seems ambivalent about finishing. Nita is unsure of what she

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wants to do once she graduates and where she wants to go. Nita isn't really sure if she is going to graduate as she knows little about her academic progress, but has stated that she not making very good grades at the moment. Nita expressed feeling overwhelmed with the thought of the future and she isn't sure where she can get help.

## Discussion Questions:

1. What are your concerns with this case?
2. Is there any guidance that which you can provide Nita that might help alleviate some of her anxieties?
3. List your next steps.
4. Things to consider:

## Visit with School

You stopped by Chavez High School, which is where Nita attends school and met with Nita's guidance counselor, Ms. Ann Sherwood. Ms. Sherwood explained that Nita has struggled since coming to Chavez High School. Nita was transferred to Chavez at the beginning of her sophomore year. Ms. Chavez recommending extra tutoring to help Nita bring up her grades; however, she did not provide any insight as to the possible causes for Nita's struggles. Ms. Chavez did not seem concerned that Nita had any substance abuse issues.

## Discussion Questions:

1. List your concerns after visiting with the guidance counselor.
2. Are there any other additional questions you would ask the guidance counselor?

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3. Is there anyone else you would like to interview? If so, who would that be and what questions would you ask?
4. List your next steps.

## Visit with Case Worker:

You are concerned about Nita's grades and decide to contact Nita's case worker to discuss the options that are available to help Nita succeed. The case worker mentions a program called Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program. This program is designed to offer assistance to youth who have been or are currently in foster care. There are stipends that youth can receive that will help provide tutoring and other services that he or she may need to help achieve independence. The case worker stated that she will reach out to the school and the foster parent to make these arrangements.

1. Do you have any other concerns you would like to address with the case worker? If so, please list those concerns.
2. List your next steps and the people with whom you would like to interview next.

## Visit with Foster parent:

A few months have gone by and you decided to follow-up with Nita's foster parent, Ms. Shilling, to see how Nita's tutoring sessions are going. Ms. Shilling reports that Nita is making progress and has not received a failing grade on a test, quiz or paper since the tutoring began. Nita's grades are mostly Cs, which is a huge improvement. Ms. Shillings reports that things between her and Nita have been okay. She complained that Nita does not like to help around the house. Ms. Shillings also stated that she thinks Nita has a "chip on her shoulder," and expects to always get her way.

1. Do you have any concerns after visiting with the foster parent? If so, list those concerns.
2. Are there any additional questions you would ask the foster parent? If so, list the questions you would like to ask.

3. List your next steps.

## Visit with Nita

During your next visit with Nita you find out that she has an opportunity to work a part-time job, two days a week performing administrative tasks at the hospital. Nita seems very excited about the opportunity. You hope that this job will help with Nita's leadership skills and responsibility and maybe even improve her relationship with Ms. Shilling. During your visit you decide to use the Possible Selves model to help Nita focus more on her future goals. While doing the Possible Selves Model, you find out that Nita has an interest in becoming a nurse. Nita shares with you that she has a cousin who is currently working as a nurse. You decide that you are going to give Nita a little bit of homework to complete prior to your next visit. You encourage Nita to research local schools with nursing programs and the cost of tuition. You also suggest that Nita research the types of degrees nurses need along with their salaries. You plan on following up with Nita to find out what she learned.

Even though you are only court ordered to visit Nita once-a-month, you have some free time and decide to visit Nita two weeks later. During your visit Nita excitedly shares the information she has learned. She found out that it is cheaper to attend a community college. She also learned that she can become a registered nurse with an associate's degree. Nita is planning on discussing this with her guidance counselor to see if she will help her with the application process. You ask Nita how she felt about doing the research on her own and she stated that she thought it was fun and really learned a lot. You also encouraged Nita to reach out to her cousin who is currently working as a nurse to find out what he thinks about the job and if he has any advice for Nita. You leave this visit feeling hopeful for Nita as her grades are improving and she currently has an after graduation plan.

## Early spring

You receive a call from the case worker that Nita has been removed from her home. Social services is exploring other options for placement to include a group home. You remember that Nita has been in one group home prior to her placement with Ms. Shilling; however, you do not recall talking much about that experience. You ask the case worker what happened, because the last you had heard Nita was doing well. The case worker reported that she had received a call from Ms. Skillings accusing Nita of smoking marijuana in her bedroom with a friend from school, Josefina. Ms. Skillings did not have any physical evidence, but she claimed she smelled marijuana coming from Nita's room. Nita claimed that Ms. Skillings was over reacting and that she and her friend were only burning incense.

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Ms. Skillings did not believe Nita and asked the case worker to please find another placement for Nita.

## Visit with Nita at new placement

You meet with Nita for the first time since she was placed at St. Xavier House for Girls. While Nita is moved in, she is far from being settled. Nita hates it there and doesn't feel comfortable around the other girls or staff. She misses seeing her friend Josefina and stated that Josefina was the only person in the world that understand or cares for her. Nita's is excited that the staff are still allowing her to keep her job. She likes her job and wants to work more, especially over the summer. She said it's weird that there are no black nurses or doctors in this hospital and that she is determined to change that. She thinks it would be pretty cool to be the first black nurse to work at this hospital.

During the visit Nita also talked about her sister. She is happy that her sister was adopted and has found her forever family; however, she often feels sad that she hasn't had the same opportunity.

### Activity: (Creating a CASA/GAL Action Plan)

During this activity, you will be assessing the youth's independent living skills by creating a CASA/GAL Action Plan. A blank template can be found on page 45 of the Fostering Futures Volunteer Manual. Once the plan has been completed, have the CASA/GAL volunteer review the plan with her or his Supervisor and discuss next steps.

### Optional Activity: (Practice Court Reporting Writing Skills)

This activity is designed to help strengthen the CASA/GAL volunteer's court reporting abilities. During this activity, the CASA/GAL volunteer will be making recommendations for Nita. These recommendations will be included in the court report. Remember recommendations to the court are written to reflect the youth's best interests and are the result of the CASA/GAL volunteer's work. The judge will decide whether or not to order the recommendations, so it is important to write recommendations that are concise, clear and backed by evidence that you have collected and reviewed.

Ideally, your facilitator will provide you with a template to use for this activity that comes from the local court jurisdiction in which the children and families you will serve, reside. If there is not a template available, the last page of this document can be used to write your recommendations. Refer to the Writing Effective Recommendations Handout

Remember your recommendations should:

- Be Youth-focused
- Be Strength-based
- Contain specific and measurable outcomes

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- Cover all the youth's needs
- Be supportive of the Independent Living Plan
- Supported in the Body of Report

## SAMPLE CASA/GAL VOLUNTEER REPORT TO THE COURT

HEARING DATE:

CASE NUMBER:

CHILD/REN'S NAMES:

DOB:

PERSON'S INTERVIEWED

RELATIONSHIP TO CHILD

ATTEMPTED INTERVIEWS

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

PLACEMENT HISTORY

DATE:

TYPE:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

### SUMMARY

*This section is to be written objectively—do not include your own feelings or thoughts—just state the facts. Remember, the summary provides the “evidence for the recommendations you will be making to the court.*



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## PERMANENCY PLAN:

*The goal of permanency planning is to provide a child with a safe, stable environment in which to grow up, while in the care of a nurturing caregiver, who is committed to a life-long relationship with that child. This plan is extremely important if the child is not currently living in a permanent home. Please identify one of the following permanency planning options. Consult with your CASA/GAL Supervisor for additional options within your CASA/GAL program jurisdiction.*

1. Reunification: return to the home of the parent, guardian, or legal custodian
2. Adoption
3. Third party custody with someone other than the parent
4. Dependency guardianship

## RECOMMENDATIONS (please continue to the next page for additional space as needed)

*Remember, recommendations to the court are written to reflect the child's best interests and are the result of the CASA/GAL volunteer's work. The judge will decide whether or not to order the recommendations, so it is important to write recommendations that are concise, clear and backed by evidence that you have collected and reviewed.*