

2-11-16

Appropriations Committee Hearing on the DSS Budget

Please Protect SAFETY NET SERVICES

Brendalena Williams

I was referred to the Safety Net program in August of 2015. At the time, I was living in a domestic violence safe shelter in New London, after fleeing a dangerous relationship in North Carolina. My abuser followed me there from New Haven. I was in the shelter with my 18 year old daughter and my 10 year old special needs son.

Anissa met me at the administrative offices of Safe Futures in New London and immediately began providing me with resources. I learned of the rental assistance benefits. Anissa provided me with a program brochure that I could give to potential landlords along with a letter that briefly explained the program. At the time, my son Evan was not enrolled in school and we felt hopeless and uncertain of our future. My daughter had hopes of attending college and I so wanted to see her follow her dreams.

On our behalf, Anissa advocated to a potential landlord who was willing to rent to us even though she understood I was not working and only had the social security benefits of my son, which I needed to use to care for him. After speaking to Anissa, the landlord was willing to accept the program and we moved into our own apartment in mid-September. Safety Net helped with the security deposit and sequential rent.

Because I had to leave all my belongings behind, Anissa emailed a referral to the Connecticut Furniture Bank so that we would be able to furnish the apartment, as well as, obtaining a new bed for my son. Anissa helped me research all the local elementary schools in the area so that I could contact them on my own to be sure that Evan got enrolled.

Together Anissa and I applied for medical and SNAP benefits for myself and my children online with DSS. Without transportation and having to care for Evan, it was difficult for me to get back and forth to Norwich to the local DSS office. Anissa was able to assist me with bus passes so that I could travel across town to choose a school for Evan. Anissa has assisted me all the while with updating DSS with my information and ensuring that my rent has been paid by utilizing Safety Net services.

Once settled, Anissa provided me with contact information to apply for Energy Assistance, as well as, assisting with payment of both our electric and gas bills. In addition, she assisted me by providing food vouchers while I was waiting for my SNAP benefits to be approved.

Anissa advised us of the local community health center and contact information of an eye doctor that takes HUSKY insurance. We were able to get medical services, as well as, eye care.

In November my 102 year old grandmother came to live with me. I was advised of a program through the state where I could be paid to care for her. Anissa helped me research the information and I was granted a stipend through Adult Foster Living. Now I am able to help care for my grandmother and also have income for basic needs. My grandmother is able to be with her family instead of in a nursing home

and I am building skills as a home caregiver which will help me with future employment. I finally feel like we are going to be successful as a family.

Evan is happy in school and gets the extra care that he needs there. I am able to care for my grandmother in the last years of her life. My daughter is looking to enroll in community college in the near future.

Anissa has been supportive through our entire process, especially when my mother passed away suddenly, a few months ago. I feel that I can count on Anissa to do her job efficiently and in turn that eliminates stress from my life and I am able to focus on my family.

I am grateful for all the services that Safety Net and Catholic Charities in Norwich/New London have provided for my family. It has been a very difficult six months and never once felt like I was alone after meeting Anissa. She was reassuring and efficient. My family has been successful thus far because of that.

I appreciate the program and hope in the future Safety Net can continue to help other families like mine in their time of need.

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