

## 2-11-16 Appropriations Hearing

### DSS Budget

#### Protect Safety Net Services

N. Hall

I was referred to the Safety Net program after my TFA benefits had ended. I was under extreme financial strain and had numerous other personal issues that were preventing me from looking for work and being able to take care of my family.

I was referred for Safety Net services several times before my Case Manager was actually able to help me. I had received TFA benefits in the same month my first referral was made by DSS so I was not eligible for Safety Net services. All the while, my Case Manager was returning my calls and advising me of the status with my Safety Net referral. I appreciated that she was trying to help before she was required to.

Finally Anissa called and came to visit me and my children at my home in Taftville in September of 2015. My daughter was 3 years old and my son was an infant. I was arrested for shoplifting groceries because I felt I was forced to commit a crime in order to get what I needed for myself and my children. The Safety Net program was able to help me with bus passes so that I could attend court and meet with my probation officer in Norwich. My Case Manager was also able to help me with food vouchers that I could use at Shop Rite. I was also assisted with a referral to Safe Futures in New London to use their clothing donations. My Case Manager has also brought diapers and baby clothes for us from her agency.

Due to chronic homelessness, I have rental assistance through T-RAP, but without any income, I found myself unable to pay my electric bill. The Safety Net program immediately assisted me with contacting and negotiating with my electric company to help me avoid shut off. They provided me with the information to apply for Energy Assistance.

I also met with the Safety Net clinician and was given a behavioral health referral to UCFS in Norwich and was encouraged to continue working with the RAP worker and my previous case manager through Reliance House. I have a long history with substance abuse and prostitution. As well as, chronic severe back pain that limits what I can do as far as employment and caring for my children.

Safety Net staff encouraged me to seek medical services for pain management through UCFS, given my previous problems with substances. Since then I have been working with a specialist for my pain and considering lumbar fusion surgery. I have applied for disability and have been utilizing an attorney to help me with my claim. Safety Net staff provided me with contact information so that I could help myself in those areas. I am alone and without transportation so I need to rely on others for help.

I have utilized the local food pantry at Catholic Charities in Norwich and am able to supplement my SNAP that way, along with the Safety Net food vouchers. The Safety Net program assisted me during the holidays with a referral to Toys for Tots. I was thrilled because without any money I could not make Santa Claus happen. Although I had no money for wrapping paper, my children were happy on Christmas morning and for that I was grateful.

Safety Net staff also sent a referral for childcare to TVCCA right down the street from my home for the Little Learners program. My daughter Nevaeh was accepted and loves school. However, I have been unable to pay the minimal fee of \$8 per week. The Safety Net Program assisted me with contacting TVCCA and submitted a request to the Safety Net program for assistance with payment, even though this is considered a special request. With Nevaeh in school, I know that she is safe and I am able to travel more easily to my numerous medical, legal and mental health appointments with only my son Castro.

Although I am worried about my future because I am nearing utilizing all my Safety Net financial benefits, I am grateful to the program and especially to my Safety Net staff for servicing my family the way that she has. I can count on her to call me back, discuss my concerns and rely on her for assistance with my needs and the needs of my kids.

The Safety Net staff encourages me to stay the steady course and has connected me with more resources than I knew were available to me and my kids. I'm hopeful that I will be successful in receiving disability coverage so that I can support my family in the future. I enjoy my visits with my case manager and will miss her when our time is over. I would like to thank her and thank the program for everything.

Nilda Hall