"The cycle needed to change"



"Definitely different" is how Marlena, a parent of a child with complex needs, describes the treatment her 14-year-old daughter is receiving while placed at the Albert J. Solnit Center - South Campus.

These compliments should not be taken lightly, as they come from a parent who has extensive experience with the children's behavioral health continuum.

Since 2012, Marlena and Jennifer have interacted with the child welfare, mental health, and criminal justice systems throughout Connecticut. A decade later, Jennifer was still in desperate need of the right type of interventions administered by professionals with the utmost of expertise.

Marlena was clear that she recognizes the impact of family discord on her daughter. For a three-year period, she herself was incarcerated and Jennifer was placed with family members for approximately five years. Jennifer's father also spent long periods away from the family while he was serving time in jail.

At a young age, Jennifer began demonstrating behaviors consistent with early childhood trauma. Difficulties in school and peer relationships were seen with bouts of depression and anxiety following. Outpatient, extended day treatment and in-home services were implemented.

Short term gains did not sustain into the long term.

Jennifer required placement into several private psychiatric units across the state. Upon discharge, it was only a matter of time before the unsafe behaviors again began to manifest themselves.



Group home placement and other congregate care settings were the next steps for her. While progress was made, Marlena remained cautious.

When Jennifer returned home, she again became aggressive towards those around her, damaged property and threw objects including scissors, prompting visits by law enforcement "You need to learn how to be a parent," is what Marlena remembers Officers telling her.

At this point is when Marlena began to fear a negative stigma was attached to her daughter due to her behavioral health conditions. She was concerned the police had labeled Jennifer as a "problem child" which then would follow her into adulthood where the consequences of her actions would be more severe.

Would professionals from other disciplines also view her in this manner?

"Parents fear they will be blamed for something going on at home," Marlena stated. "Parents get tired of asking for support within a system so overbearing and confusing. "You are already overloaded and now are asked to figure out more stuff."

"It's challenging."

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an emerging behavioral health crisis in children including Jennifer. Again, she was in and out of hospitals with no real long-term improvement in her behaviors.

"I realized the level of care she needed was something I could not give her," Marlena stated. "The cycle needed to change."

Solnit South was authorized as her placement.

Marlena immediately recognized the difference in the care her daughter began receiving.

"They deal with her behaviors. They deal with them with her," she stated. Marlena speaks of the unique approach of Solnit's culture starting during the admissions process, when staff sat with her, she met everyone in the room and when she advocates - staff listen.



Marlena especially wanted to point out that Jennifer's therapist "meets me where I am at." Communication is "streamlined" amongst clinical staff making it is much easier to receive and provide facts about Jennifer's progress.

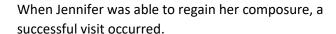
In previous placements, Marlena felt providers looked at her as "just the mom." At Solnit, Marlena's voice is well-received. She was even able to talk out a disagreement with a Nurse. "She listened," Marlena stated.

Marlena participates in therapy once a week with Jennifer. "How you will behave here is how you will behave at home," is the message her

daughter receives. They openly discuss rules, consequences and truly what it will take to have Jennifer discharged back home.

Marlena was quick to point out a recent intervention by staff as Jennifer was preparing to visit with her. Jennifer was having a difficult day.

"Empathy and skill" are how Marlena describes the staff intervening with Jennifer to calm her down, give her space and work to move her from this "aggressive state."





In Marlena's experiences, Jennifer would have been sedated or restrained for demonstrating the same behaviors in another facility. At Solnit South, "they teach the child how to calm themselves down," Marlena advised.

"They waited," Marlena stated. "In other places, they would have called off the session."

At Solnit, Marlena believes Jennifer is "still in reality" and "not in a bubble" with her behaviors and the expectations put upon her.

"Jennifer is given the opportunity to make the right choices versus the right choices being given to her," Marlena described her experiences.

What would she tell another parent about Solnit South?

(The names and other identifying information have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the family)

[&]quot;This is a good place," Marlena stated.

[&]quot;I feel it would have made a difference if she went there first."