

Samaris Rose - A True Advocate



Samaris Rose gave birth to the first of her five boys when she was 15 years old. As a teenage mother, she remained in school and had a job while her son went to daycare. Her second child came a few years later.

So did her first interaction with the Department of Children and Families.

Samaris' baby had an unexplained mark on his body. A call from the daycare to DCF prompted an investigation - and removal of her two children who were placed into a core foster home. "I did not believe it," Samaris stated when thinking back on the day her children were separated from her.

Samaris denies to this day she ever hurt her son. In fact, the professionals involved in her case even disagreed amongst themselves about what happened. It appears she was caught up in the risk adverse mindset of the Agency at that time.

Samaris saw the child protective services system from the inside, and it was not a good look. "Everyone thought it was a joke," is how she described the court process and the steps she was given to regain custody. Samaris recalls the visits with her children in a DCF office and how her own mother was told "no" when she offered herself as a kinship resource. This was reflective of the practice decades ago when the Department did not actively engage relatives in caring for their family members.

Samaris described how her little boy developed separation anxiety while placed into foster care which now manifests itself as adjustment disorder as an adult. "He does not want to be out of my presence," is how Samaris describes her oldest son and the long-term effects of this experience.

Samaris and her boys were reunified after a long 6 months.

Samaris went on to have a third child. In a twist of irony, he also presented with the same type of unexplained mark on his body which prompted the removal of her two other children years earlier. This time, the outcome was different. It was determined that the child caused the mark himself by rubbing his leg on a Velcro piece of the divider to keep a child on their side. Samaris firmly believes this is what caused her first son's injury, yet no one listened.

"What I experienced is not what I see today," is how Samaris describes the current practices at DCF. She is now on the frontline of listening to families, advocating for them and she brings the



knowledge she has gained to the Statewide Advisory Council (SAC) for DCF where she has been a member for over five years.

The SAC provides the Department of Children and Families with oversight and advisement. This diverse group of private providers, parents with lived expertise and community advocates meet monthly to receive updates about the Department and provide feedback on policies, practices, legislation, and budgets.

Samaris is vocal and provides valuable insights.

"Five years ago, they were looking for a parent," Samaris stated and she has been an active member ever since.

Little did Samaris know she would one day use her circumstances to shape that same system which she believes treated her so poorly so the next family's experience would be better.

"Years ago, it was call DCF and they will take your children. That is not what happens today," Samaris stated. 'You guys do absolutely everything you can to keep families together.'

Over the years, Samaris has since contacted the Department herself to access specialized behavioral health services for a couple of her adolescent boys when Voluntary Services was still administered by the Department and before Voluntary Care Management was established through Beacon Health. Although at first, contacting the Department caused an adverse reaction given her prior experiences.

"They really get you the support you need," is how she describes today's DCF.



Samaris is a leader in her community and found herself in a position where families would frequently ask her questions about the system, where to go for help and how to work through the negative stigma attached to those seeking supports.

"I have this situation," parents would say to her.

She was also frequently asked how to navigate DCF and respond to the Agency.

Samaris began networking and building relationships with providers. She wanted to use her life's journey to give back.

Samaris started a non-profit with her own money and established a website called Justasksammy.org

"People should have their dignity and pride even when seeking help," she stated.

Upon accessing the website, families can articulate the issue they are having. In a unique approach, Samaris then does an intake with the family, refers them to a provider and speaks directly to the community agency to ensure the full context of support is understood.

"We stick around to make sure the organization is held accountable," she stated.

The number of families she has assisted is in the hundreds.

Samaris realizes the struggles families face especially as she raises five African American young men between the ages of 15 and 24 years of age. She has interfaced with the education, law enforcement and other systems which has not been an easy experience.



"Scary," is how Samaris describes the violence on the streets.

When her God son was lost to gun violence, she connected a second group to her existing non-profit called "Restoring Effective Support and Treatment" (REST). Modeled after a program in New Jersey, REST provides mentorship and is aimed at keeping youth off the streets. It directly addresses gun violence.

Her days are full.

She sees a lot, hears a lot but continues to serve others. "My relationship with the Lord allows me to make it through," she clearly articulated.

What does Samaris say to those who are concerned about DCF involvement? "Don't worry. Don't be afraid and cooperate," she tells them.

"Don't be in denial of what is happening for fear of where the help is coming from."

Thank you, Samaris, for your never-ending positive spirit, for sharing your story, and for advocating on behalf of Connecticut's children and families.