

## Rosa and Jonathan Diaz Interview Transcript

Reviewer: Hello, Mr. and Ms. Diaz. We appreciate so much your letting us come to your home today to talk with you. Let me tell you about why we're here and why it will be helpful for us to talk with you. We're part of a team of people who are here this week reviewing the state's child welfare system to see what's working well and what might need to be improved so that the agency can better help families and children. Several case records were pulled at random to be reviewed in different parts of the state, and your son Javier's case was one of the ones that was selected here and assigned to us. So, we've been reading through Javier's case file, and we've talked to him and some of the other people involved in his case. We thought it would be helpful if we talked with you to get an idea of the contact you've had with the agency, what they may have done to help you, and anything you wish they might have done differently for either you or your son. We really can't intervene in your case in any way or change anything, but what you tell us will help the agency know how, in the future, to work better with families and children so that things turn out well for the families in the end. We hope you'll feel free to be really open with us about what your experiences with the agency have been. And we want to assure you that anything you tell us will be confidential. We won't share with the caseworker—or anyone else involved in Javier's case—what you tell us. We have some specific questions we want to ask you, but we want you to feel free to tell us at any time if you either don't understand or would rather not answer one of the questions. If it's okay with you, I'll be asking most of the questions, and my partner here is going to be taking some notes, so we'll remember later what we asked and what you said. Okay, before we begin, do you have any questions?

Jonathan Diaz: Just to make sure I understand, when you talk about the child welfare system, you mean CPS, right? That has custody of my son? And the caseworker is Vanessa? I can't remember her last name.

Reviewer: Yes, that's right about CPS, and that's the agency or the system we're talking about. Sorry for not clarifying that up front. And yes, Javier's caseworker is Vanessa Thomas. So, to start out with, can you tell us a little about how Javier and Maria came to be in the guardianship of Mr. and Ms. Gomez?

Jonathan Diaz: Well, Lisa Gomez is my sister. I'll be honest with you...my wife and I have had drug problems for a long time. When the kids were small, I guess we weren't taking very good care of them, and CPS got involved. Javier and Maria ended up going to stay with Lisa and Manuel for a while so we could both go to rehab, but my wife and I just couldn't seem to get it together back then. So finally, we agreed that Manuel and Lisa could have guardianship of the kids. That was at least 10 years ago. The kids have had a good home with them, until Manuel and Javier started not getting along. We know what the problem is. Manuel and Lisa are just real, real old fashioned and strict, and when they found out Javier was gay, Manuel hit the roof. We really wish we could have had Javier come and live with us, but it just hasn't worked out that way.

Reviewer: How often have you seen Javier in the past year, or since he's been in the custody of CPS?

Rosa Diaz: I guess we've seen him maybe two or three times. He ran away from one of his foster homes and spent the night with us...I think that was back last December. But we made him call Vanessa the next morning because we were afraid we'd get in trouble and that he'd get

in worse trouble. So, he called, and Vanessa came and got him. Then we ran into him one time downtown. And I think maybe we saw him one more time for a few minutes at Lisa and Manuel's house. He was just leaving after a visit when we drove up, and we got to talk to him just a few minutes.

Reviewer: Do you get to talk to Javier on the phone some?

Jonathan Diaz: Not much. We have an old cell phone someone gave us, but we have to buy minutes for it, and we're out of them a lot of the time. We're really having a pretty tough time right now. My wife hasn't found steady work, and my work—I'm a bricklayer—isn't all that steady right now either. It's about all we can do to pay our rent every month and buy a little gas for the car. The car barely runs, so we just use it mostly for me to get to work and back, to buy groceries, and things like that. I think Javier tries to call us sometimes, but the phone doesn't have minutes a lot of the time, so we don't get his calls.

Reviewer: How many times have you seen or talked to Vanessa, the caseworker?

Jonathan Diaz: The first time was when she came to see us back in November. Javier was staying with Ms. Lopez and doing real well, but she was moving out of town so he needed another place to stay. Vanessa came to talk to us about our situation, and she asked us if we thought we might be able to clear some things up so we could have Javier come live with us. She said Javier had asked her to come because he really wanted to live with us.

Rosa Diaz: It kind of broke our hearts, but we had to say no, that he couldn't come and stay with us. And I don't think CPS would have let him, anyway, with the shape that we're in. We're really struggling right now, and it's about all we can do to keep it together and stay clean and pay our bills. We're both doing real good right now, though, and we've been off drugs for several months now.

Reviewer: Did Vanessa ask you what you needed, and, if so, what did you tell her?

Rosa Diaz: She asked us if we thought we could pull things together, if we had services and resources, and have Javier come and live with us in a few months. We had to tell her we really didn't think so, that it was all we could do to take care of ourselves. We're both going to NA and AA meetings, I have meetings with my probation officer, and I'm always trying to pick up a little work here and there. But we told her definitely we wanted to stay involved in Javier's life and have a better relationship with him. Because she talked about resources, we asked her if she could help us find a way to get more minutes on our phone so we could talk to Javier more and if she could bring him by for visits some because we had to save our gas for work. And where he is now is pretty far from us, and I'm not even sure our old car could make it there.

Jonathan Diaz: And I remember that we told her we sure did want to know more about what was going on in his life and where he'd be going to live. Then he ran away that time—in fact, he ran away twice, I think—and we've really been concerned about him. Since he and Manuel don't get along very well anymore, we told Vanessa we wanted to be there for him and let him know we cared about him...and that we'd do anything in the world to help him, but we're just not in a position where we could have him come and live with us.

Reviewer: After Vanessa visited you in November, did she let you know where Javier went to live after that?

Jonathan Diaz: No, she didn't tell us, but she told Manuel and Lisa, and they told us. We don't talk to them a lot, but, when we do, we always ask about Javier, and they tell us a few things. That foster home didn't work out very well for him, but we understand he's in a good place now that he really likes.

Reviewer: Have you seen or heard from Vanessa other times since November?

Rosa Diaz: She came to see us one other time. I'm trying to remember when it was...probably early in the year, maybe February. She said her supervisor wanted her to come one more time and see how we were doing and if anything had changed. She asked us again if we thought Javier might be able to come live with us eventually, but we told her we didn't think so. She also told us he was doing good where he was, but she just wanted to check with us again in case things didn't work out for him there. We told her we really missed getting to know how Javier was doing and that we'd appreciate it a lot if she could help us stay in better touch with him.

Jonathan Diaz: I remember my wife asked her again if she knew of anyone that could help us with minutes for our phone and if she could bring Javier by some to visit with us, or if she could help us with gas money so we could go visit him. We told Vanessa we sure did want to see him and know more what was going on with him. We're always afraid he just thinks we don't care about him. She said she'd see what she could do, but she never brought Javier by and didn't give us any help with the phone or with gas money.

Reviewer: Are there other things Vanessa could have helped you with?

Rosa Diaz: Well, sure...I guess so. We almost got evicted once because we were having trouble paying our rent, so we could have used some help there, but she never asked us about things like that.

Reviewer: Did Vanessa ever call you?

Jonathan Diaz: She called us a couple of times the first time Javier ran away; that was before Christmas, so it was probably sometime in December. She just asked us if we'd seen him and if we'd call her if he showed up at our place. Of course, even if she had called other times, we'd have probably missed her calls because of not having minutes on our phone.

Reviewer: Just to make sure I'm understanding correctly, you only saw Vanessa twice in the past year when she came to your home? And you talked to her on the phone approximately two times?

Jonathan Diaz: Yes, that's right. [Looks at his wife.] Isn't that right? [Ms. Diaz nods yes.]

Reviewer: Did Vanessa ever talk to you about being involved in case planning for Javier? That is, did she talk to you about what Javier had going for him, what he needed, and what kinds of things needed to be done for him or by him? And—I know we've already talked some about this, but I need to make sure I understand—did she talk to you about your strengths, or the things that were good about you and your home, and what you needed so you could have a better relationship with Javier like you wanted?

Rosa Diaz: No, she really didn't. We just always kind of felt like we disappointed her because we didn't think we could provide a home for Javier. You don't know how much we wish we

could, but we're finally just getting on our feet enough to stay away from the drugs and take care of ourselves. But no, she didn't talk to us much about Javier except to say he wanted to come and live with us. And like we said, she really didn't ask us about what we needed or how she could help us.

Reviewer: Mr. and Ms. Diaz, I can't tell you how much we appreciate both of you for meeting and talking with us today. The information you've given us has helped us a lot to understand Javier's case better. Before we go, is there anything else you'd like to tell us that we didn't ask about?

Rosa Diaz: No, I think we've said it all. We just wish things had been different, and we could have had Javier come and live with us. And it would have given us a lot of peace of mind, if Vanessa was too busy to bring Javier over, if she could have just kept us informed about how he was doing and what he was up to. Anyway, I know we've talked about that. Thank you for listening to us.