

Heidi's Case Study:

Heidi Mueller is the 24-year-old daughter of Gudrun Mueller, a native German who became a naturalized U.S. citizen. Heidi was born on the outskirts of Ft. Leonard Wood, MO. Her father, a career soldier, left the mother just prior to Heidi's birth. The mother moved in with another soldier for several years, but the couple never married. Heidi's mother was an alcoholic who was actively drinking during the pregnancy. There is a strong likelihood that Heidi has fetal alcohol syndrome. After nearly a ten-year common-law relationship, the paramour left Gudrun and Heidi. Because Gudrun had some distant relative in northeastern Pennsylvania, the mother and daughter relocated here shortly after Heidi's thirteenth birthday. Heidi participated in special education classes and had a poor academic history in Missouri. Her performance deteriorated even further with the adjustment to a new school district. Heidi's I.Q. was assessed at 65. She did not adjust well to the move and had few friends. Not accepted by the mainstream fellow students, she began to associate with a tough crowd of teenagers, some of whom had left school at age sixteen.

Gudrun had a falling out with her relative, and there was no other informed support network available to the Muellers. Mrs. Mueller's heavy drinking persisted. She also had a history of cardiovascular problems and was warned repeatedly by her doctor to make some lifestyle changes in terms of her excessive drinking, smoking, poor diet, and lack of exercise. All these warnings went unheeded. At age 38, shortly after Heidi's 18th birthday, Gudrun succumbed to a massive heart attack.

Heidi, alone, and employed at a minimum-wage job as a stock clerk at the local grocery mart, left the apartment where she and her mom had resided and moved in with a group of teenagers. Shortly after the move, she became pregnant. Eight months later, she prematurely delivered a baby boy, Jonathan, who tested positive for phenylketonuria, (PKU). When Jonathan was thirteen months old, Heidi became pregnant again, by the same young man, Ken Parnam. He was a school dropout who worked in a local auto-body shop. By now Heidi, Ken, and the baby had their own small, one bedroom apartment. Heidi's delivery was unremarkable, and the second son Adam was born. Heidi and Ken had a turbulent relationship. Ken was often critical of Heidi's cognitive slowness and he was initially verbally, then physically abusive. When Adam was three months old, Ken left the area. Heidi became eligible for public assistance. She was able to enroll Jonathan in a head start program.

During Jonathan's kindergarten enrollment, the child had experienced prolonged problems with head lice, causing him to be put out of school until the situation was brought under control. Despite several attempts on Heidi's part, she was unable to effectively curb the outbreak. Due to Jonathan's repeated school absences, C and Y was notified by the school nurse, who suspected that the child was neglected.

The C and Y caseworker found Heidi to be a well-intentioned, loving parent who tried to be cooperative. However, Heidi appeared lethargic and despondent. During the initial home visit, the case worker reported that the apartment was filthy, there was evidence of roach infestation, and the temperature was uncomfortably cold.