

The Hernandez Family

The Report

The anonymous report indicates that two children, a boy and a girl, about four years old, are wandering the neighborhood without adequate supervision. They are ill-clothed for the weather. The reporter says she has seen this once before and at that time the children asked for food, saying they were hungry. The reporter says the children are the grandchildren of Rosa Hernandez, a woman in her late 50s, who lives in the same apartment complex as the reporter. There is another child, a boy about eight, who goes to school. The mother of the children is in jail. The grandmother has physical disabilities and she drinks and doesn't take good care of the children.

Mrs. Rosa Hernandez

Mrs. Hernandez is 57 and currently the sole caregiver for her daughter's three children, Joaquin, age eight; Maria, age four; and Estevan, age four. Her daughter, Rosina, had lived with her since the twins' birth. The fathers are unknown. Rosina has a heroin and alcohol addiction and was incarcerated for forgery. She is due for release in three months, having served 13 months so far. She has been receiving substance abuse counseling in prison, and constantly tells her mother and children that she can't wait to get home. Rosa receives financial assistance (TANF) Here is how she sees things:

- Sometimes food is scarce, and she can't get to the food bank easily anymore since it moved to a location four blocks off the bus line. But the children always have something to eat.
- Children should be allowed to play outside, and the twins are old enough to play on their own block. In her heart of hearts she knows that this is somewhat risky, but she can't keep them cooped up all day, and she can't always get downstairs with them.
- She probably does drink a bit too much during the day occasionally, and when she does, she watches TV and isn't always aware of the exact whereabouts of the twins, although Joaquin is usually at school, so he is fine. Sometimes she keeps Joaquin home to help with the younger ones, especially if she is sick. Also, her drinking is really under control; she never falls asleep from drinking or loses the ability to walk and talk correctly.
- She suffers from Rheumatoid arthritis. Sometimes she is confined to her chair and often has difficulty chasing after the children. She used to take some pills, but they cost too much. She believes she should go back to the doctor, though, since the pain is worse now and her knuckles are often swollen.
- She feels she can hang on only so long as the sole caregiver. Her friend and her daughter help her some, but it is not enough. Rosa counts the days until Rosina's release. Rosa really would like some help now but is afraid of talking to her TANF worker, because she has heard stories of children being taken away. On the other hand, she actually knows a woman who got daycare for her kids, and Social Services didn't take her kids away, even though she had left them alone when she went to work. Also, Rosa routinely trades a small amount of her food stamps for liquor and cigarettes, and she is terrified that someone will find out if she gets too involved with any of those Social Services people.

The Situation

When the worker arrives at the home, the twins are in the living room watching TV and eating chips. Joaquin is not there, but school is still in session. Rosa has alcohol on her breath but shows no signs of inebriation.