

actually penalized Lisa for scoring rather high in math. She called Lisa "paranoid" because she stated she didn't trust the CPS and feared they would take her baby. Judges rarely read these Psych-evals anyway. They just skip to the page with the expert's conclusion on it. And despite the lack of evidence, the conclusion recommends further state interference.

How big is Child Protective Services of Santa Cruz County? Reading the Santa Cruz County budget can be a daunting experience. The 1996-97 budget reports CPS receives \$1,876,450 from the state and \$1,465,762 from the federal government. According to David Silva, a retired county welfare worker, "The county typically budgets more than is requested. If, at the end of the year, the money has not been spent, it must be returned. This provides a built-in incentive for CPS to go out and get more cases."

At this writing, Lisa's daughter Star is in a foster care home, and Lisa must fight to even be allowed to visit Star, who is now 19 months old. Lisa sold her camper for badly needed funds. She was later told the baby would have been returned to her, if only she had not sold her camper.

Heather Hanson, her face haggard, her demeanor weary, shuffles between motels, shelters, the couches of friends, and sometimes the street. Gone are her dreams of going to college, of reuniting with her

children, or even of being happy again. She is filled with anger, depression, and grief. Who could blame her?

Gov. Pete Wilson, when confronted with accusations that massive AFDC cuts would cause mothers to be unable to provide for their children, replied that "...welfare mothers really have a responsibility to a child and to taxpayers," and that giving up a child they don't have the means to support might be best for both the child and for taxpayers.

According to Richard Harrington, "Our Supreme Court has ruled that the most fundamental of these basic rights of liberty is the right of people to sire, to bear and to raise their own children as they see fit unless any reasonable person would say they were clearly being abusive or neglectful towards their children's rights.

"A concomitant right is the right of the children, again apart from clearly abusive or neglectful situations, to know, to be with daily and continuously, and to be raised by both of their own parents with all their faults and inadequacies."

While this is the law of the land, CPS has its own law. In an official statement reminiscent of Nixon's refusal to give out information on public agencies "for reasons of national security," CPS maintains its secrecy "to protect the children."

But in a system where there are no checks and balances, where each placement financially rewards the placers, no baby is safe, and no mother, especially if she is poor or homeless, can give birth without fear of the agency whose stated purpose is to protect and serve her children.

IS IT LEGAL FOR CPS TO TAKE THE CHILDREN OF HOMELESS MOTHERS?

Is it legal for Child Protective Services to take a child solely because the parent is homeless or under-housed? According to Linda Lemaster, Chair of the Santa Cruz Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and long-time welfare rights advocate, the answer is no. At least not legally.

Lemaster explained: "California made an out-of-court agreement with the Western Center on Law and Poverty's lawyers which led to our state's AFDC Homeless Assistance program. This program provides for security deposits to AFDC-eligible families who are homeless. When AFDC Homeless Assistance was created to prevent the lawsuit's going to court, California's Department of Social Services was admitting to their habit of seizing children from their parents solely

because of homelessness. The State, in making this backroom deal, also promised to cease and desist tearing families apart where homelessness is their only excuse."

In many cases, a family in crisis could, with a little support, resolve the crisis and stay together. A family at risk of homelessness often just needs help with housing, but CPS doesn't help houseless families find homes. They "remove" their children and place them in foster homes as a matter of public policy. In virtually every case, this is done to the detriment of the family and at far greater public expense.

Tama found a clue as to why CPS had picked her out: "I saw the mobile home park I now live in mentioned in a brochure the County gives out, listing services for homeless people. The brochure names food services, where to get clothing, counseling, etc. Under the section marked 'Shelters' is our trailer park."

Undoubtedly, in some CPS file which neither Tama nor any other member of the public will ever see, under housing, the worker has written "lives in a shelter."

Anyone with complaints involving Child Protective Services of Santa Cruz should contact the Santa Cruz County Women's Commission at (408) 454-2772, attention Rita Flores.

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