

On May 30th Veterans Affairs Secretary, Eric Shinseki, not only provided his letter of resignation to the President but he provided former Hawaii DHS Director turned South Carolina Department of Social Services Director, Lillian Koller, with the wording to tender her own resignation on June 2nd. Interestingly enough in both cases critics say that the "distraction" Shinseki and Koller refer to as their reason for resigning won't be enough to resolve the problems that grew in each of their agencies under their administration. In Koller's case, the critic's voice rings true...

In 2005 a domestic violence victim from New York named Sheri fled with her three children – the youngest of whom was only three months-old – to Hawaii to escape her abuser. Sheri's oldest children, two boys, had witnessed the abuse of their mother by a man who they believed to be their father. Children who have been exposed to DV often have behavioral disturbances post-separation (their "parting gift" from DV) as a result of seeing their mother victimized, demeaned and humiliated in front of them and Sheri's boys were no exception.

Now beyond the abuser's reach, Sheri's oldest boy began "acting out" with his impressionable younger brother following his lead and tagging along. By December 2008 Sheri had successfully transitioned from victim to survivor BUT as a single mother with no support system, Sheri became well-known with the local police who she called repetitively asking for assistance in controlling her sons out-of-control behaviors that included things like: running away from home, staying out "running the streets" until all hours, skipping school, hanging out with bad adult influences who would smoke and drink, stealing food, money, jewelry and other valuables from her that she later discovered were all offered as gifts to her sons newfound "friends".

With little long-term success, the police recommended that Sheri take her oldest (then 11) to the Juvenile Intake Probation Office in January 2009 but even with the involvement of probation, the eldest continued to defy and act out against his mother. Desperate for help, Sheri called Child Welfare Services (aka CPS) under the presumption that CPS would provide her with support and services. Under CPS advisement, Sheri signed a Voluntary Foster Care Agreement for her 11 year-old who was subsequently taken into foster care.

Without his brother's influence, the behavior of Sheri's second boy (9 years-old) in the home slightly improved but he would still do things like run away, skip school or stay out whenever he felt like it. Sheri continued to call the police when her son would take off and soon a rather lengthy run away report list resulted. On the last weekend of August 2009 Sheri had to report her son missing yet again. Although he returned and Sheri called the police to report his return, the police advised her to leave the run away report open – and good thing she did because on September 1, 2009 he took off yet again. The last time Sheri saw her son that day was at 5:00pm.

In the early morning hours of September 2, 2009 Sheri's 9 year-old was found riding The Bus unaccompanied. Taken by police to Kapiolani Medical Center, her son realized that he was "in trouble" so cited child abuse as the reason for his absence from the home. The police called Sheri asking her to come down to the precinct but since it was the middle of the night and her 3 year-old daughter was sleeping, she declined to do so. When police arrived at her home shortly thereafter, Sheri presumed that her son had been located and was being returned to her; instead Sheri was arrested for child abuse on her son's word alone and despite the lack of physical evidence. Sheri's sleeping daughter was taken from her bed and placed into protective custody (where she would be bounced around from place to place for nearly a year).

Distraught, scared, confused and unfamiliar with legalities, Sheri plead No Contest at the criminal hearing that followed and cooperatively completed all tasks that were asked of her by the court and CPS.

By now a substantial list of professionals had become involved with Sheri's boys, with all of them witnessing and experiencing firsthand the very behaviors Sheri had initially asked for help with - this validated and substantiated what Sheri had been reporting to authorities all along!

In July 2010 Sheri's nightmare looked like it was finally coming to an end - except for the family therapy and home-based services that could only be authorized, sanctioned and referred by her DHS Social Worker, Sheri had completed all aspects of her CWS Service Plan so "by the book" her children should have been getting ready to reunify with their mom. Instead a month later, without any attempt or efforts for reunification with her mom, Sheri's now 4 year-old daughter was sent back to New York – back to the abuser who she had no memory of and to the abusive household Sheri had successfully escaped from in 2005!

## Koller's SC tenure lasts less than a case opened under her HI reign

Written by Dara Carlin | Examiner

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In the meantime, Sheri's second boy began recanting his account of abuse that landed him in foster care. Not believed (or not willing to be believed) he was admitted to Queens Medical Center twice; once for becoming out of control after demanding to see his mom and the second time for becoming suicidal. Today DV survivor Sheri remains without her children: her two boys remain in Hawaii state foster care (5 years and counting regardless that the "timeframe is not to exceed two years from the date your child was first placed in foster custody" <http://humanservices.hawaii.gov/ssd/files/2013/04/A-GUIDE-TO-CHILD-WELFARE-FINAL.pdf> Page 8) and her daughter – soon turning 8 – is growing up without her mother because the abuser is repaying Sheri for breaking the cardinal rule of DV: "You will not leave me".

When it was revealed that the abuser was not her boy's father Sheri refused to name him after seeing what CPS did with her daughter. In an effort to force her hand, Sheri's son was told this information and to this day no therapeutic or reunifying services have been implemented to heal the rift that's been created as a result; Sheri's son is now 14 years-old.

Because Sheri is a good Christian woman she believes in abstinence before marriage so in 2010 when she learned that her eldest was being given condoms while in foster care, she was outraged that her son was being taught about sex without the Christian moral values and beliefs associated with it. Today her eldest is a father at the ripe old age of 16 (and remember, he's still in foster care)!

Mistakes are truly our greatest teachers but they become our biggest tragedies when we fail to learn from them. Everyone will forgive a mistake IF the person/professional whose made the error has enough humility to:

- acknowledge the mistake
- ask for forgiveness
- offer an apology and
- make amends.

What's happened to Sheri and her children is an example of what happens when professional mistakes are made and no one's willing to own up to them or do the right thing to correct them – South Carolina took steps to correct their administrative mistake, hopefully Hawaii will follow suit considering the legacy's origin.

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If you or someone you know has been involved with Hawaii's Department of Child Welfare Services, please direct them to the following link: <http://rscrapz.com/rSurveys/HI/index.html> which is a survey for those who have been involved with Hawaii CPS regardless of what island you're on. The information gathered will be used to help those who are working to prevent situations like Sheri's from happening and for positive change in Hawaii's child protection system.