

What it was like to have gone through the system and come out the other side? What are my concerns about what we will see on the “other side” of the Corona pandemic?

By Katrina Yearicks, CHILD USA Community Ambassador | May 11, 2020

I write this blog post today to share part of my firsthand experience of what my children and I went through in three states, how I overcame it, and my concerns for what may be in store after the pandemic for children.

I am mother of three children. Two of my children were “allegedly” abused by their father who had houses in three states. I am a massage therapist, a nurse, and a veteran of the United States Navy, serving part of my time caring for the U.S. Marines as a Corpsman. I am also a [Community Ambassador for CHILD USA](#).

I’ve experienced one of the WORST pains a mother or any parent could go through with two of my children. From the very first disclosure of abuse, reporting, investigation, to the end — we went through HELL. I believe the pain was due to the very first inadequate police investigation, failure of the courts to protect my children, lack of communication between states, and NO initial child protection investigation in the state the abuse occurred. These failures caused a chain of unfortunate events, which then snowballed into a ripple effect causing more years of trauma, abuse, reports, emergency room visits, forensic interviews, exams, and investigations.

A state trooper who later became a detective at the prosecutor’s office interviewed my kids twice, telling me “what your kids said are crimes.” Despite this, the prosecutor refused to file charges due to the children being too young to testify. They were six and eight.

For six years, I fought for the protection of my kids. I lived at the courthouse. I was a single mom not receiving court-ordered child support. I sat for hours in the social service buildings looking for any help. I visited food banks. My number one priority was being a mom: providing a roof over my children’s heads, food in their bellies, working, protecting, and advocating for my kids. I did everything I could do to try and help them have a “normal” childhood.

A child custody motion was filed by their father. I was Pro se, representing myself, for most of it. I researched on what to do and I did it. I even had our first family court judge recused all by myself. The child custody case in front of the new judge took two and a half years, over 79 appearances. I did not lose custody of the children, but the Judge’s decision was *shocking*.

Let me share a quote from the judge at that final decision day: “I don’t believe you, and I don’t believe the children.”

My children and I endured endless mounds of stress and trauma during this process. This situation strained my immediate family tremendously. Going through the system to protect and be the voice for your children was absolute *hell* but I *never gave up*.

This saga finally ended in 2016, and now, in 2020, I am in the best health ever. All of my children are excelling in school and sports. However, I am concerned about the long-lasting effects of this experience on my children. I was diagnosed with PTSD because of the trauma my children and I suffered: threats of a warrant from the Judge if I refused to turn my children over,

threats of physical violence from a police officer, and threats by state trooper to never show up at the barracks ever again or he would arrest me and my children would not be protected.

A lot has changed in our lives. Now, I advocate for many changes in the system. I will do my best to bring my recommendations forward.

My big concern right now, while the world is on lockdown, is what is happening to the children who do not have an outlet? What is happening to the children who cannot speak of the neglect and or abuse that may now be happening? There is an increase in drug and alcohol consumption, and this inhibits behaviors of abusers. There will be *many* new custody battles and reports of abuse to come.

Always believe the children.

If you can remove yourself and children from the situation do it. When your child discloses something, immediately take them to the police, report it, and call child protective services on the state recorded line. Start a journal of events and everyone you speak with. Take pictures and videos. Call the doctor or take to your child in question to the emergency room before they bathe. Wrap the clothes they were in when the abuse occurred. Make sure the hospital or doctor notifies child protective services immediately and calls the police. Get yourself and your children into counseling as soon as possible. Find a support group. Talk to friends. Exercise.

I took an oath to serve my country. Three oaths to look out for my fellow Americans. I will continue to do my best to protect and serve my country as an Ambassador with CHILD USA.

Don't ever give up. Believe a child.

Katrina Yearicks

