

Trauma-Informed Compassion Fatigue Resiliency Workshop Case Study

Marcy went straight into university after high school and completed her BSW at age 22. She started with child protective services shortly after graduating. In school, Marcy learned about compassion fatigue and that “self-care” was important. She was living with a roommate who was completing her nursing degree and in a committed dating relationship.

When Marcy first started with CPS she was nervous to start working with families who were experiencing risk, but excited to start using her social work skills. She felt energized and wanted to help as much as possible.

Because Marcy was new and wanted to do well, she would sometimes go into the office a bit early to thoroughly write and review her notes as well as refer to her textbooks for skills that would help her support the families she was working with. She loved the unstructured nature of her work that allowed her to be out of the office and meeting with families, however, this often meant that she had to wait longer to take a break or eat.

Marcy did well from the beginning as she built good connections with her clients and was able to support them during difficult experiences. What Marcy enjoyed the most was working with the children and seeing their relationship with their caregivers strengthen. When she witnessed this connection, she felt so good about being able to support them.

Marcy soon had a full case load and was even approached to take on extra cases when their unit was short staffed. She found it difficult to say “no” to her supervisor, so she took on extra cases.

After two years of full-time work Marcy was feeling good about her skills and while she enjoyed connecting with families, her original energy and excitement for her work was lower. She was often going into the office early, rarely taking actual breaks and would eat while writing notes or driving. She had a work phone and would leave it on in the evenings and weekends because she was waiting to hear from a client who had missed an appointment or she was concerned that one of her clients would need her.

Marcy began to gain weight. She was no longer in floor hockey or softball because she missed too many games from working late. She had a good friend in CPS and they would go for late dinners and have wine to relax. Some mornings she felt good about going to work and other morning she “didn’t feel like it”, but would get going with some coffee and a muffin.

After three years in CPS Marcy decided she didn’t want to be in CPS forever and began a part-time MSW program so she could practice clinical social work with individuals. This meant most

of her time was spent working or in school. Marcy began to feel tired all of the time. She struggled to keep up with her documentation at work so she would work on it at home on the weekends. She was now living with her fiancé, but rarely spent time with him or anyone else.

In her fourth year at CPS, there was a violent incident resulting in a fatality in one of the families in her unit. It wasn't her case, but she was part of the team that helped during the incident. After that Marcy noticed she had a hard time relaxing in the evening unless she had a glass of wine. She felt tense often, was grinding her teeth and experiencing tension headaches regularly. She had dreams of the incident and became much more vocal about her sister's need to be more protective of her three-year-old niece.

Marcy spent most of her fifth year with CPS and final year of her MSW with high anxiety. Just thinking about all her cases, the recent fatality in their unit and how much she had to do would bring her to tears. She no longer enjoyed her work, but needed to keep working until she finished her graduate degree. She also wanted to get a good reference from her supervisor as she would be looking for new clinical work soon.

She could only sleep a few hours at a time. She often felt irritable and argued with her husband. She was concerned about drinking wine too often so substituted it with late night snacking. By the time she finished her MSW she had gained almost 50 pounds and felt ill most days. She decided to quit her job with CPS before she had a new job.