

## **Best Interests Assessment Summary Tool**

**Meeting with Juanity and her children in their home, the progress made since the critical incident several months ago is evident. The house is organized, and both children appear comfortable and settled. While the immediate crisis has passed, Juanity speaks openly about her ongoing challenges with legal proceedings and her daughter's nightmares. Her commitment to recovery is demonstrated through her recent engagement with alcohol counseling and her proactive approach to seeking support for her daughter.**

### **The Child: Development and Vulnerability**

**During the visit, both children engaged in play nearby, though 5-year-old Maria (name changed) stayed closer to her mother than her sibling. While showing me her favorite toys, Maria demonstrated age-appropriate play but became noticeably anxious when her mother briefly left the room. Both children appear well-cared for, with Juanity quietly maintaining boundaries and routines throughout our discussion.**

#### **Maria Notreal (5 years)**

- **Experiencing trauma symptoms following incident**
- **Nightmares and separation anxiety noted**
- **Clean, well-presented**
- **Age-appropriate speech and play**
- **Strong attachment to mother**
- **Requires mental health support**
- **Shows resilience through maintaining kindergarten attendance**
- **Good appetite and sleeping patterns emerging**
- **Close relationship with maternal grandmother**
- **Demonstrates ability to express feelings through play**
- **Requires ongoing therapeutic support**
- **Shows strong trust in mother's protective capacity**

#### **Tommy Notreal (7 years)**

- **Witnessed traumatic incident**
- **Protective of younger sister**

- Maintaining school attendance
- Engaged in after-school activities
- Strong peer relationships
- Some anxiety symptoms but less pronounced
- Good communication skills
- Close bond with grandmother
- Demonstrates resilience
- Supportive relationship with teacher

#### **Pattern and History**

Juanity's protective response during the incident, while chaotic, demonstrated her fundamental protective capacity as a mother. In our discussion about that night, she showed clear insight into how her actions, while protective, created additional challenges. "I'd do anything to protect my kids," she stated firmly, "but I know now there are better ways to handle things. That's why I'm getting help."

#### **Constraints and Risks**

- Pending legal proceedings
- History of alcohol misuse
- Recent trauma exposure
- Financial stress from legal costs
- Limited social supports
- Mother's mental health needs
- Children's trauma symptoms
- Historical poor judgment regarding relationships

#### **Strengths and Protection**

- Mother's immediate protective action during incident
- Engagement with alcohol counseling
- Stable housing maintained
- Strong extended family support
- Children attending school/kindergarten regularly

- **Mother's insight into needs**
- **Proactive help-seeking**
- **Grandmother's ongoing support**
- **No further concerning incidents**
- **Improved home environment**
- **Clear safety planning**

### **Beliefs and Relationships**

The relationship between Juanity and her children shows strong attachment despite recent challenges. The children's grandmother, Freda, remains actively involved, providing both practical support and emotional stability. Juanity speaks with insight about rebuilding trust within her community and strengthening her support networks.

### **Constraints and Risks**

- **Trust issues following incident**
- **Social isolation during recovery**
- **Complex legal situation**
- **Mother's ongoing anxiety**
- **Children's trauma responses**

### **Strengths and Protection**

- **Strong maternal protective capacity**
- **Positive extended family relationships**
- **Growing professional support network**
- **Children's resilience**
- **Mother's commitment to change**
- **Grandmother's consistent presence**
- **Emerging community connections**

### **Current Environment**

The home environment has stabilized significantly since the incident. Juanity has established clear routines, and the children's spaces are organized and age-

**appropriate. Pictures on the walls and craft activities suggest regular family engagement and emotional security is being rebuilt.**

#### **Constraints and Risks**

- **Financial pressure from legal issues**
- **Ongoing stress from court proceedings**
- **Limited social opportunities**
- **Mental health barriers**
- **Transport challenges to appointments**

#### **Strengths and Protection**

- **Stable housing**
- **Regular routines established**
- **Safe home environment**
- **Access to support services**
- **Grandmother nearby**
- **School/kindergarten engagement**
- **Basic needs consistently met**

#### **Safety and Action Statement**

**The family has demonstrated significant positive change since the critical incident, while acknowledging ongoing support needs. Juanity's engagement with services and insight into remaining challenges provides a strong foundation for continued improvement.**

#### **Current Outstanding Needs**

- 1. Mental health support for Maria**
- 2. Ongoing legal support**
- 3. Mother's continued recovery support**
- 4. Family trauma counseling**
- 5. Community reintegration support**
- 6. Financial counseling**
- 7. Parenting support**

## **8. Mental health care for mother**

### **Risk Assessment**

**While acute risks have reduced, support needs include:**

- **Children's trauma recovery**
- **Legal proceedings management**
- **Ongoing mental health care**
- **Substance use recovery**
- **Community reconnection**

### **Required Actions**

#### **1. Immediate support needs:**

- **Legal Aid engagement**
- **Child mental health referral**
- **Mother's counseling continuation**
- **Financial counseling**

#### **2. Medium-term support:**

- **Family therapy**
- **Parenting support**
- **Community reintegration**
- **Recovery maintenance**

#### **3. Ongoing support:**

- **Legal advocacy**
- **School/kindergarten liaison**
- **Mental health monitoring**
- **Family relationship building**

**The family demonstrates strong potential for continued positive development with appropriate support. Juanity's protective capacity and insight into support needs provides a solid foundation for intervention. While multiple needs exist, the stability achieved since the incident suggests good capacity for continued engagement with services and ongoing recovery.**

