

## Case Study | Mrs. Vishnick and Meta

SOWK 7327 | Social Work with Older Clients (Fall 2000)

### COURSE CONTEXT

This case study has been most often used in social work practice courses and can also be used in Human Behavior classes or sections of social work courses focusing on individuals with disabilities and issues related to cultural diversity. Students are urged to explore possible interventions with Mrs. Vishnick, Meta and their family at the individual and family system levels, as well as examining appropriate community services available for older adults with developmental disabilities.

### CASE

Mrs. Vishnick is an 87 year-old widow who is the primary caregiver for her 64 year-old daughter, Meta, who has mental retardation. Meta has very limited functional ability, as she requires total support in all activities of daily living including dressing, feeding, toileting, and bathing. Meta does not participate in any services for persons with developmental disabilities and has never been involved in any community programs.

This family approached the county developmental disability services when Mrs. Vishnick became ill and required hospitalization. The only other family member is Mrs. Vishnick's younger daughter, Teresa, who is married and lives in the same neighborhood. Although Teresa spends time with Meta, she has been adamant that she and her husband will not become the primary care providers for her when their mother can no longer function in this role. Teresa was the person who contacted the disability service agency in the present situation.

In understanding the family history, several events and situations have important meaning for the family's current situation. First of all, Mrs. Vishnick and her husband immigrated to the US from Eastern Europe when they were first married. When the couple arrived in this country, Mr. Vishnick secured a job at an automotive manufacturing plant and they had Meta. When she did not seem to be making developmental progress, the Vishnick's physician encouraged them to place her in an institution, which they did not do. After the birth of Teresa, the demands of raising two children became overwhelming for Mrs. Vishnick, and Meta was moved to the state institution which was about 75 miles from the family home. One year after this move, a fire destroyed much of the institution, although Meta was uninjured. However, Mrs. Vishnick was so consumed with anxiety about her safety, Meta returned to the family home. Since this time, Meta and Mrs. Vishnick have not spent a single night separated until the recent hospitalization.

Several issues emerged that relate to current needs of this family. First, Meta has very limited functional and coping skills to enable her to participate in any type of program for person's with developmental disabilities. In addition to her need for support in all of her activities of daily living, she is uncomfortable with non-family members. From a service perspective, there are limited program options for older adults with developmental disabilities within their community, as most services are geared toward younger adults. The issue of providing support to Mrs. Vishnick is also crucial. Since she has been the primary caregiver for Meta, the perceived change in her role may be threatening and produce anxiety about changes in the relationship with her daughter. Concerns about the previous experience with the family physician and the trauma around the fire can also precipitate concerns and anxieties about using services. In addition, Teresa and her husband may

need support and education about their possible roles as siblings of an older adult with developmental disabilities.

Overall, social work interventions need to take place at the individual and family systems, as well as community levels for older adults with DD and their families.