

LIVE UNITED™



A Week in the Life

We are going to introduce you to the Smith family. A fictional family for privacy purposes but a story that is the truth to so many who live in Oswego County. Please meet mom, Nancy; daughter, Kelly; son, Brian and their baby brother James. Picking her daughter Kelly up from a sleep over, Nancy learns Kelly has shared with her friends some uncomfortable touching she has experienced with her father, Nancy's husband. Angry, sad, and scared for her daughter, Nancy calls the police and child protective services; they encourage the family to meet them at the Child Advocacy Center.

When Nancy and Kelly enter the child-friendly center, Kelly walks in to see dozens of kid's handprints on the wall of all sizes with ages next to them. This is the first time she realizes she isn't the only kid who has had something like this happen to her. For the first time in a long time, she feels safe. For the next few hours, a trained forensic interviewer takes Kelly to a private room to talk about what has happened with her father and to receive a medical exam. Meanwhile, Nancy talks to a Victim Advocate who helps her work through her feelings, gives her some information and then begins a safety plan for what might happen next if her husband is arrested.

The feelings of anger and sadness are pouring out of Nancy; she's concerned with where her and her three kids will live. How will they afford housing? Nancy has been a stay at home mom for years to raise her children. Mr. Smith had always taken care of the income and finances. They moved here from out of state for his job and to be closer to his family – she feels very alone and scared.

The advocate is aware and trained to deal with all of these emotions. They educate Nancy on all the community agencies that are available to help her and her kids through this. Nancy signs a consent form so the Child Advocacy Center can begin to make calls on their behalf to find housing, food and basic necessities. Through this conversation, it is disclosed that Nancy's son Brian has been facing great difficulty in his first year of school and has been diagnosed Autistic. They have received little support or direction in how to address his issues. After hearing more, the Child Advocacy employee refers Nancy to ARISE to hopefully address this and get Brian on a better track. Even though the family is directed to another agency to help form some stability for the brother; the Mental Health Counselors and Victim Advocates from the Child Advocacy Center will continue to offer support through the legal and family court processes as everyone moves towards healing.

The Child Advocacy Center of Oswego County is imperative when addressing victims of abuse. They create a safe environment for the victim that allows everyone to come to them, instead of the family moving from one office to the next. In 2014, Oswego County was #1 in the state for the number of children reported to be victims of abuse per capita.

Thankfully to the United Way funding, the Child Advocacy Center is able to help families overcome this tragedy and move forward. But they don't do it alone; one of their stronger points is that they are a part of a United Way community of agencies that also help provide comfort to families like The Smiths.

When the Smith family arrives at the ARISE office after being connected with the Access Service Coordinator, they begin working on process to see if Brian will be Office for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (**OPWDD**) eligible. This process can be long and in the short-term leaves the family just waiting. Therefore, ARISE will link them up to non **OPWDD** services in the meantime. It has been stressed during the meeting from Nancy that there is a lack of support and no educational plan for Brian. An Educational Advocate will also intervene with the school and become Brian's

advocate to get on a more successful education track. Nancy, during this waiting period is connected with the Medicare Service Coordinator.

The Medicare Service Coordinator (MSC) and Nancy will discuss services available if he is **OPWDD** eligible. Also, the Smiths had never needed to receive benefits for Brian's disability before because they were financially stable and Mr. Smith had always said no. Now, Nancy knew that they would need this extra support for Brian. So the MSC gets them connected to the advocacy department where they receive help on filling out a SSI application and hopefully Brian is eligible for some sort of disability.

The Smith's are currently at the mother-in-laws but Kelly does not feel safe there and Nancy knows it is not a long-term option but does not have the ability to afford housing at this point. She is learning through her conversations with the Child Advocacy Center and ARISE that Oswego County Opportunities has SAF houses which are available immediately to her and her family for as long as needed and are encouraged through the legal process. ARISE also has a Housing Coordinator, that can assist Nancy and the kids with locating an affordable house as a long term home.

Nancy's last immediate concern before leaving her mother-in-laws is food. She has no way of providing meals for her kids. And this is where Human Concerns joins the picture.

When Arise called Human Concerns, an emergency food pantry in Oswego, they stated that there was a family in need of our services. The mother had no access to family funds and was in need of emergency food to get through the weekend. When Nancy arrived, Human Concerns explained that they could provide her with three days of emergency food, nine meals for each family member. They also clarified that she could come to the pantry every 30 days for food. Since there were four in her family, they were able to provide her with 36 meals, enough to sustain her while she arranged emergency help with other organizations. Human Concerns were also able to provide her with the information she needed for Social Service benefits, SNAP (food stamps), WIC, free and reduced lunch and health insurance information. After they advised her about services available to her, she was able to choose from their shelves the food she knew her family would eat.

Human Concerns is an emergency food pantry serving 240-300 families per month. Families come for help for all different reasons: a working parent loses his job, a parent is incarcerated; drugs and alcohol play a role along with a lack of education, mental health issues, or disabilities. The Smith Family is just one example of the cases we deal with at Human Concerns. Last year Human Concerns served over 8,035 individuals, 72,000 meals. With the help of United Way funding they never have to turn people in need away.