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NOS. 4-11-0922, 4-11-0923 cons.

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF ILLINOIS

FOURTH DISTRICT

In re: Timo. W. and Time. W., Minors,) Appeal from
THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS,) Circuit Court of
Petitioner-Appellee,) Champaign County
v. (No. 4-11-0922)) No. 09JA62
TIMOTHY WASHINGTON,)
Respondent-Appellant.)

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In re: Timo. W. and Time. W., Minors,) No. 09JA62
THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS,)
Petitioner-Appellee,)
v. (No. 4-11-0923)) Honorable
YOLANDA THOMAS,) Richard P. Klaus,
Respondent-Appellant.) Judge Presiding.

JUSTICE KNECHT delivered the judgment of the court.
Justices Appleton and Pope concurred in the judgment.

ORDER

¶ 1 *Held:* (1) The trial court did not commit reversible error by not specifying on which ground it found respondent mother unfit, when the termination petition alleges her unfitness and sets forth with particularity the grounds of the unfitness charges and the record clearly and convincingly supports the judgment.

(2) The trial court properly found it was in the children's best interests to terminate the respondent father's parental rights.

¶ 2 These consolidated appeals (Nos. 4-11-0922 and 4-11-0923) involve twin children Timo. W. and Time. W. (born January 11, 2008). In October 2011, respondent parents' parental rights to both children were terminated. In her appeal (No. 4-11-0923), respondent mother, Yolanda Thomas, argues the trial court erred by not specifying the ground or grounds on which it

found her unfit. In his appeal (No. 4-11-0922), respondent father, Timothy Washington, argues the court erroneously found it in his children's best interests to terminate his parental rights. We affirm.

¶ 3

I. BACKGROUND

¶ 4 In September 2009, the State filed a petition for adjudication of neglect and shelter care on behalf of Time. W. and Timo. W. The State alleged the children were neglected because their parents were not providing the medical care necessary for the children's well-being (705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(a) (West 2008)). The State alleged the children's environment was injurious to their welfare because the children were exposed to the risk of physical harm and substance abuse and Thomas had failed to correct the conditions that resulted in a prior adjudication of parental unfitness in regard to Time. W.'s and Timo. W.'s half-siblings (705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(b) (West 2008)).

¶ 5 At the October 2009 adjudicatory hearing, both parents stipulated the children were neglected. Thomas stipulated she failed to provide her children with appropriate medical care. Washington stipulated the children, when residing with him, were exposed to substance abuse. In November 2009, the trial court entered its dispositional order, placing guardianship and custody of the children with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

¶ 6 In April 2011, the State filed a motion to terminate the parental rights of Thomas and Washington to Time. W. and Timo. W. The State alleged both parents were unfit in that they failed to (1) make reasonable progress toward the children's return within any nine-month period after the neglect adjudication, specifically from July 13, 2010, through April 13, 2011; and (2) maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the children's welfare

(750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2010)).

¶ 7 A hearing on the parental-fitness allegations was held over two days in July and August 2011. The State presented the testimony of counselors and the family caseworker. Both respondents testified on their own behalf.

¶ 8 Heidi Reible, a counselor with Cognition Works, testified she facilitated parenting-education groups. Reible worked with Thomas in a parenting group beginning in June 2010. Thomas's attendance was good, but her participation was minimal. Thomas often needed prompting to participate or share homework, although she did complete her homework assignments.

¶ 9 Reible testified she believed Thomas had an incomplete understanding of the concepts she was teaching and the way to apply those concepts to her own parenting skills. Thomas's answers on her homework did not "quite mesh with that would be expected, in terms of using the information to form her framework in dealing with" her children. Reible testified, in group, they discussed thinking patterns, tactics to avoid accountability, and questions that lead to responsible choices. They also worked with the participants in designing a framework or strategy for outlining general expectations in the home and consequences for not complying with those expectations. Thomas identified her own maladaptive-thinking patterns, including having difficulty in accepting new information. Thomas also identified herself as having an unrealistic self-image, seeing herself as responsible despite her conduct.

¶ 10 Reible wanted Thomas to continue using the framework in her home. Reible wanted her to focus on being self-critical and identifying her thinking patterns and how those fit into parenting.

¶ 11 Cynthia Johnson, a clinical therapist at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), testified she began working with Thomas in February 2011. She began by assessing Thomas. The first four sessions involved gathering information for a mental-health assessment. Thomas did not cancel or show for some sessions and called to cancel and reschedule at least one other. Thomas missed four or five sessions. Thomas called to cancel and reschedule two of the sessions. It took approximately six to eight weeks to complete the assessment.

¶ 12 Johnson testified it "took quite some doing" to develop a rapport with Thomas. Johnson had to get information from Thomas's caseworker because Thomas did not immediately disclose information during their sessions. For example, Thomas did not want to disclose Washington was married and had not obtained a divorce. Thomas did not want to discuss or disclose information about the family history of substance abuse.

¶ 13 Johnson testified after the assessment, they worked on setting treatment goals and creating a treatment plan. They were unable to finalize goals because Thomas had a positive urine screen for marijuana. LSSI did not engage in therapy with an active drug user. Johnson testified Thomas's counseling referral was closed on April 18, 2011. They had not begun actual counseling as of that time.

¶ 14 Johnson testified she did have some difficulty with Thomas in scheduling the initial session. It took a month to set her first appointment and Johnson sent notice to Thomas that if she did not keep her February 14, 2011, appointment, she would close the counseling referral. Thomas kept that appointment.

¶ 15 Thomas told Johnson she felt victimized by LSSI in regard to her third-party visits and because the children were not placed with family. Thomas was dissatisfied at not getting

credit for the services she did complete. Thomas believed "the issues with [her children's] kidneys had been blown out of proportion" and the children were "doing well." Thomas did not believe Time. W. was developmentally delayed but was instead quiet and shy.

¶ 16 Johnson testified, after the counseling referral had been closed, she notified Thomas how to reinstate services by a letter. Thomas could return after three successive clean urine tests.

¶ 17 Sally Anderson, a counselor under contract with LSSI, began counseling Washington in November 2009. As of July 2010, Anderson and Washington were working primarily on parenting skills. Washington's workload prevented him from attending a parenting class, so LSSI asked Anderson to work with him on parenting issues, such as the children's needs. They talked about the children's social, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual needs and what parents should be doing to help the children. Because Time. W. and Timo. W. had special needs, they worked on what special-needs children would need medically.

¶ 18 Anderson testified Washington preferred to work on parenting skills rather than have therapy. Washington listened courteously but he did not always agree with Anderson on issues she believed important. As an example, Anderson testified Washington did not agree with turning off the television during visits. Washington believed the visits were "sort of for the love and their special time together," while Anderson wanted him to incorporate the things they discussed.

¶ 19 Anderson testified she tried to encourage enrichment activities that did not require additional purchases. She suggested activities to help enrich the children's language, because they were having some language problems. Washington thought these activities were things he

could do once the children were returned. After visits, Washington would simply report that he played with the children. He once said he did give the children paper and worked on drawing shapes.

¶ 20 Anderson wanted Washington to be more proactive in parenting, rather than simply passively responding to the children. This approach was in response to reports Washington and Thomas, before the case started, were not checking with doctors about the children's appointments and they were not checking on visits. Anderson wanted him to pick up the phone and ask questions—to show "it's really important." Washington would wait until the foster mother contacted him if he needed to know something. Anderson testified Washington was not improving in this area.

¶ 21 Anderson testified there were issues of medical neglect, the children's failure to thrive, and the children's developmental delays. Because of his children's health issues, it was important Washington know how nutrition impacts the kidneys. Washington believed the children were fine because they ate well. Anderson wanted him to see that if they did eat well and were not growing, there was a medical issue. Washington believed the failure to thrive diagnosis was due to a miscalculation by the caseworker or the care the children received after being removed from Thomas's and his care. Washington seemed to believe his children were okay, but Anderson received reports the children were "really fragile." Time. W. might need a transplant. The parents needed to be on top of these issues.

¶ 22 Anderson testified, beginning in summer 2010 and into the winter 2010, Washington was chronically late to their appointments. Washington also did not show for some appointments.

¶ 23 Anderson testified she and Washington discussed his substance abuse and how such use impacted his children. Anderson testified substance abuse was not an ongoing issue in their counseling. The issue did not come up again until Washington had positive drops over the winter. Initially, Washington denied the first positive test. He later admitted drug use stating he was under a great deal of stress from the case.

¶ 24 Anderson testified she discussed with Washington what would be in the reports she was preparing. Washington believed everything was satisfactory and nothing was deficient. He believed he was doing what he needed to do. He had been through the process of attending classes and therapy. Anderson tried to explain the difference between progress and effort. Washington believed they would be ready when the children were returned home. Anderson testified she told Washington why one might conclude he was not making progress.

¶ 25 Anderson testified she learned, in January 2011, Washington's visits were changed to supervised by LSSI because the third-party supervisor had not been staying for or supervising the visits. When Anderson talked to Washington about the incident, "[h]e sort of minimized it," and did not believe any of it was his fault. Anderson told him he should have contacted his caseworker or her office immediately, but he did not agree he had done anything wrong.

¶ 26 On cross-examination by the guardian *ad litem*, Anderson testified she began working with Washington as a result of medical neglect, because a number of critical medical appointments had been missed while the children were in their parents' care. When Anderson attempted to discuss this issue with Washington, he responded in a number of ways. Washington said he was in prison during some of that time and could not be held responsible. Another response was that he left that responsibility to Thomas. A third one was appointments were

made with different physicians out of town and no one contacted them about those appointments. Washington believed they should have been contacted if the children needed to be immunized or checked on.

¶ 27 Anderson made suggestions to Washington about the steps he could take to make sure he was informed fully regarding appointments. Anderson believed the children's medical problems would be life long, and so she encouraged Washington to have a calendar, a notebook, and a file for each child and to keep meticulous medical records. She suggested they fill the file with medical literature to use as a reference for urinary-tract infections and other problems the children had. In March 2010, Anderson informed Washington he should obtain several binders, and he eventually did. She did not know whether he filled the binders. Washington did not show them to her. Once, however, he did bring in some information he said he printed regarding kidney disease. Washington also indicated he did some research at the library. Later he admitted Thomas's therapist printed the information for them.

¶ 28 Anderson believed Time. W. had a number of developmental delays, including in receptive and expressive speech as well as in social interaction and behavior. She discussed this with Washington, but he dismissed them as due to the fact Time. W. was not good with strangers. Washington never acknowledged Time. W. had significant delays that needed to be addressed with parental effort. Anderson testified children who have developmental delays could not successfully have them addressed without parental help.

¶ 29 Anderson testified when Washington was late for his appointments, he would be 20 to 30 minutes late for 50-minute appointments. Washington would explain he had been working hard and overslept and would mention his different shifts and car problems. Anderson

acknowledged Washington worked regularly and provided income for the family.

¶ 30 Anderson testified Washington believed the main responsibility for raising Time. W. and Timo. W. fell on Thomas. Anderson opined without the assistance of another capable parent, Washington could not meet the developmental and medical needs of his children on his own.

¶ 31 On cross-examination by Washington's counsel, Anderson testified, before the family came into DCFS care, Washington missed the children's medical appointments due, in part, to his work schedule.

¶ 32 Myriam Molina, a caseworker with LSSI, testified she had the responsibility of working on this case. Molina began working with this family in September 2009 and continued to do so until June 1, 2011.

¶ 33 Molina testified she and Washington had a discussion in September 2010 about how to reach him by telephone. There had been difficulties reaching him because she was unable to leave voice-mail messages for him. The two worked out an arrangement where he would check his missed calls on his cell phone and then call her back. Washington did not begin to return calls consistently after this time. Washington rarely returned Molina's calls.

¶ 34 Molina testified third-party visits began with Washington and Thomas in November 2010. The parents were allowed 10 hours each week. On January 7, 2011, a family team meeting was held with both parents. The parents were encouraged to attend the children's medical appointments and to ask questions regarding their condition. They also discussed the rules associated with third-party visits, including the fact they could not be left alone with the children. Both parents understood the rules. On January 11, 2011, third-party visits were

suspended, after a reliable witness told DCFS the third-party supervisor dropped off the children at Washington's and Thomas's house and left without the children. When Molina and her supervisor discussed the issue with Thomas, Thomas denied the children were ever left alone with them.

¶ 35 The visits were then scheduled for one hour each week on Tuesdays. The first visit was scheduled for January 25, 2011. Neither parent showed up or called regarding the visit. The visit scheduled for the following week also did not take place, despite Molina's having left a message for Thomas reminding her of the visit and attempting to call Washington. Both parents visited the children on February 8, 2011. The parents acted appropriately with the children, and the children were happy to see their parents. Molina then told the parents the visit schedule was changing to Mondays. Both parents were told they were still required to confirm by noon the day of the visit by telephone. Both parents indicated they understood the requirements.

¶ 36 Molina testified the Monday visits were set to begin on February 14, 2011. Molina called to remind the parents of the visit three days before. She left a message for Thomas, but was unable to leave a message for Washington. The visit did not occur. The parents missed two additional scheduled visits during the relevant time period.

¶ 37 On April 4, 2011, Molina contacted Thomas to tell her she needed to resubmit a referral for a drug screen. Thomas told Molina she did not use drugs. In response, Molina told Thomas she had a positive drug screen. Thomas denied using drugs.

¶ 38 On cross-examination by the guardian *ad litem*, Molina testified during the meeting in which Thomas was informed third-party visits had been suspended, Thomas stated she wanted to surrender her parental rights.

¶ 39 On cross-examination, Molina testified she sometimes supervised the visits. During the visits, the children "were extremely happy to see mom and dad." Thomas and Washington attempted to divide their time with each child. The parents would play with the children. Thomas changed their diapers and tried to feed them. The visits were appropriate. Molina testified when Thomas mentioned she wanted to surrender her parental rights, she mentioned she wanted to surrender them to her mother. Molina told Thomas she could not talk to her about surrendering. Molina told Thomas to talk to her attorney about it.

¶ 40 Belinda Meyn, employed by Cognition Works, Inc., testified she was a facilitator for the parent-education group. Meyn testified Thomas was supposed to participate in the parent-education group. Meyn believed Thomas attended one session, but then was terminated for absences.

¶ 41 Meyn testified she also received a referral for Thomas to attend the options program, which was an 18-week group program for women impacted by domestic violence, including emotional, verbal, economic, and physical abuse. From March 2010 through October 2010, Thomas participated in the options program. Thomas had two unexcused absences she was asked to make up, and six excused absences.

¶ 42 After the March 2010 intake assessment, Meyn identified goals for Thomas. These goals included addressing unhelpful thinking patterns, such as blaming others for her situation and choices, shifting or minimizing accountability, and engaging in closed thinking. Meyn testified it was not clear Thomas was invested in working with the information and making changes. Meyn believed Thomas did not believe the information was helpful and she did not find the tools valuable. Thomas described herself as an angry person and she was fine with that.

Meyn testified she and her cofacilitator did not see much progress in Thomas.

¶ 43 On cross-examination by Thomas's counsel, Meyn testified Thomas, in terms of attendance, was considered to have completed the program. Meyn testified individuals who missed group sessions in the options program were required to attend two sessions for every one missed. Thomas complied with that attendance policy.

¶ 44 Thomas testified on her own behalf. Thomas had concerns about working with Molina, because there were communication failures. Thomas testified she and Washington called Molina, but Molina did not return telephone calls. Thomas testified she tried her best to maintain communication. She had better luck communicating with her current caseworker.

¶ 45 Thomas testified she completed the options program at Cognition Works. She testified she cooperated to the best of her ability, but she was "not a people person" and barely "said anything." Thomas completed her assignments. Thomas admitted being told her participation was inadequate. Thomas testified she ultimately completed the whole parenting program as of November 2010.

¶ 46 Thomas testified she attended a few of her children's doctor appointments. Thomas did not attend more of them because there was no communication in the beginning with her first caseworker. In addition, there were problems because if no one was available to supervise when the parents were with the children, the appointments would be canceled.

¶ 47 Thomas testified she tested positive on a urine drop on April 4, 2011. Thomas said it was a one-time relapse and she had not used marijuana or any other illegal substances since then. Thomas also did not consume alcohol since that time.

¶ 48 Thomas testified she participated in counseling with Cynthia Johnson and another

counselor. She did not believe she was making progress in that counseling because "they switched it up *** giving all [her] information to one counselor, then that counselor *** want[ed] to give [her] another one." Thomas was uncomfortable with the transition and that limited progress.

¶ 49 On cross-examination, Thomas testified she spent approximately one year working with the first counselor before the switch to Johnson. Thomas believed she was making progress working on how to be a better person and a better parent and on learning about herself. When her counselor was switched to Johnson, Thomas was not ready to open up to her. Thomas testified Johnson only asked "in this session" about Washington. Thomas stated it was her therapy session and she should not have to talk about Washington because he had a separate counselor.

¶ 50 Thomas also testified she did not know what to say during the options program because she had not experienced domestic violence.

¶ 51 Thomas testified her children saw doctors in Peoria and Bloomington because of kidney problems they had since birth. Thomas did not know anything more specific about the health history of Time. W. and Timo. W. other than they had "kidney problems." When asked if Timo. W. had any educational or developmental problems, Thomas responded she did not know of any and if he did, he didn't "act like it around [them]." Thomas testified she was told Time. W. had speech problems, but she doubted that was the case. Thomas did admit she could be wrong about that.

¶ 52 Washington testified on his behalf. Washington testified Time. W. had one kidney because the other had been removed. Timo. W. had a kidney that was not growing.

Timo. W. had one functioning kidney. It was "very possible" the children around ages 12 to 14 would need kidney transplants.

¶ 53 Washington testified he learned about the children's dietary needs. It was explained to him they should stay away from a lot of sugar and salt, so they began buying fresh fruit and vegetables. Washington testified he asked what he needed to watch for as an indication the kidneys were failing, but it was not explained to him. Washington testified he did his own research to learn of the symptoms of kidney failure, such as strong urine, skin changes, and so on. Washington testified he kept a binder of the children's medical history. The binder contained the medical reports and contact information. Washington knew Time. W. was on medication for a urinary infection.

¶ 54 Washington testified he went to the doctor appointments. He would be informed of the appointments by Molina or the foster mother. In January 2011, a family team meeting was held, which included the caseworker, the caseworker supervisor, a few of Time. W.'s therapists, Thomas, and Washington. In that meeting, they discussed the communication problems. Washington was difficult to reach while he worked. His employer, Plastipak, did not allow employees to use the phone while working. Washington testified "a lot" of appointments were scheduled during his work hours. Washington testified he "used a lot of [his] vacation days to go to doctor appointments." In the January 2011 family meeting, Washington gave Molina his work schedule for the year so it could be considered for future medical appointments.

¶ 55 Washington testified he knew Time. W. had a speech problem. She had trouble getting words out clearly. Washington wanted the developmental therapy to occur in his home, because he wanted to see the therapy so that he could work on it with her. The therapy did

"eventually" begin occurring in the home.

¶ 56 Washington testified that he was proactive in working with the children. During visits, he would work on puzzles with his children and they worked on their shapes, colors, and numbers.

¶ 57 Washington believed he could meet the children's medical, physical, and emotional needs if they were returned to him. He had arranged for his mother to stay with them and assist with childcare. Washington testified, before the children were taken, they had no one around to help them.

¶ 58 On cross-examination, Washington testified he was in work release when the children were born. He completed the work release in May 2011. Washington did not know the name of Time. W.'s school. She attended that particular school to help her catch up before preschool.

¶ 59 Washington testified he was advised by the medical court-appointed special advocate to stay away from canned food and white bread, because of the high sugar content. When asked if the children ate at McDonald's very often during visits, Washington testified they had been to McDonald's. Washington stated the children had ice cream.

¶ 60 In addition to considering the testimony presented at trial, the trial court also considered documentary evidence and discovery admissions. Records indicate Thomas was diagnosed with cannabis dependence in December 2009. Following two unsuccessful discharges, Thomas successfully received treatment from August 2010 to December 2010. Thomas failed to show for six urine drops between February 2010 and April 19, 2011. Two of the missed drops occurred in the relevant nine-month period. Thomas admitted in discovery to a positive

urine drop for tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), a psychoactive substance in cannabis (*In re A.L.*, 409 Ill. App. 3d 492, 495, 949 N.E.2d 1123, 1126 (2011) (defining "THC")), on March 14, 2011, and on April 4, 2011. Washington admitted positive drops for cocaine on January 28, 2011, and on March 14, 2011. Washington admitted a positive drop for THC on April 4, 2011.

¶ 61 The trial court entered an order finding Thomas and Washington proved "by clear and convincing evidence to be unfit persons and parents within the meaning of section 1 of the Illinois Adoption Act." The court found Thomas's testimony "remarkable as to its level of hostility and anger." The court found Thomas's testimony regarding drug use not credible and held Thomas had very little knowledge of the current medical condition and treatment of her children.

¶ 62 In October 2011, a best-interests hearing was held. The trial court considered the best-interests report filed by LSSI and a report filed by the court-appointed special advocate (CASA). The twins had been placed in the same foster home since March 5, 2010. The foster mother reported the children had healthy appetites and had adjusted to her home. Given their medical needs, the children were thriving in their foster parent's care. The foster mother offered permanency through adoption for both children.

¶ 63 According to the best-interest report, Timo. W. was born with fluid on his kidneys. He was diagnosed with congenital renal anomalies with renal dysplasia on the left kidney. The left kidney decreased in functioning. The right kidney was functioning normally. Timo. W. had a difficult time leaving at the end of the visits with Thomas and Washington. He would cry and say he wanted to stay with his parents. He enjoyed playing with his parents. Time. W. also had fluid on her kidneys at birth. She had a history of a left multicystic dysplastic

kidney that was removed and a surgical stint was put in the right kidney. The right kidney was not functioning properly. She would, in the near future, need a transplant for her right kidney. Time. W. had a speech delay. Time. W. enjoyed visiting with her parents.

¶ 64 LSSI, in the report, stated both parents were employed. Thomas and Washington remained in a relationship together. Both had positive urine screens. Thomas was positive for THC on April 26, May 17, May 26, June 24, and September 2, 2011. Washington had positive drops for cocaine on April 26, May 17, May 26, June 13, and June 24, 2011. He had negative results in September 2011. Washington had resumed group therapy for drug addiction.

¶ 65 LSSI opined Time. W. and Timo. W. had "very special needs and medical issues that will require the full attention and commitment of their caretakers." LSSI opined Thomas and Washington had "not demonstrated they fully understand the current and future needs of the children and have not demonstrated the desire to change their lifestyles to be in a position to give these children the attention and care they will need and deserve." LSSI recommended the termination of Thomas's and Washington's parental rights to Time. W. and Timo. W.

¶ 66 The best-interests report contained an August 29, 2011, closing counseling report authored by Anderson. Anderson reported Washington had not met with her since July 13, 2011. Washington had not shown up for a few appointments. Anderson attempted to reach him by telephone but was unable to do so. Anderson opined Washington's psychological evaluation indicated someone "with his intellectual profile should be able to parent their children." Anderson opined Washington had "an unsettling lack of curiosity about the children and their well[-]being." Anderson reported she attempted to discuss his failed urine screens with him. Washington explained his illegal-substance use as a matter of stress and not an addiction but did

not allow Anderson to help him with his stress issues. Washington failed to see how his drug use could put his children at risk. Anderson stated she had informed Washington what the trial court and DCFS expected of him and encouraged him not to wait until his children were taken from him, but "Washington stood by his reasoning that he had been a good and effective parent to his other children and thus did not need to make changes to parent the twins." Washington's parenting style was to place most of the parenting responsibility on his children's mothers.

¶ 67 In her report on behalf of CASA, Janet Paoli recommended terminating the parental rights of Washington and Thomas. Paoli observed if Time. W. did not receive appropriate nutrition and medication and regularly attend doctor visits, "the result could be fatal." Time. W.'s condition was not as severe as Time. W.'s but absent appropriate medical care, his condition could deteriorate. Paoli wrote the children's health stabilized in their foster mother's care.

¶ 68 At the hearing, Washington testified on his own behalf. Washington hoped to take his children home and raise them. He planned to "finish paying very close attention to their medical conditions" and to learn more about those conditions. Washington wanted to give his children a home with a mother and a father. Washington testified he would encourage his children to attend college and be active in the community.

¶ 69 Washington testified he had been receiving treatment for substance abuse since August 2011. He called the treatment "good" and "very helpful." Washington had a strategy of staying away from individuals who were a bad influence and concentrating on work. Washington testified he desired to continue in the service whether his children would be returned home or not. He wanted to finish what he started, because he had other children he took care of as well. Washington testified Thomas had the same goals and intentions.

¶ 70 By written order, the trial court terminated Thomas's and Washington's parental rights to Time. W. and Timo. W. The court found the foster parent was willing and able to provide permanency through adoption. The court concluded the twins were closely bonded to their foster parent. The court found the respondent parents continued abusing illegal substances and could not provide permanency for the children.

¶ 71 The consolidated appeals followed.

¶ 72 II. ANALYSIS

¶ 73 Thomas argues the trial court committed reversible error by failing to specify which ground or grounds were proved by clear and convincing evidence. Thomas maintains, without citation to authority, this makes the appeal problematic. The State responds by contending this very argument has been rejected by the Fifth District decision in *In re Grotti*, 86 Ill. App. 3d 522, 408 N.E.2d 728 (1980).

¶ 74 In *Grotti*, the respondent mother argued the trial court's judgment regarding parental unfitness must be reversed because the trial court failed to make a finding as to the specific statutory grounds it found to exist. *Grotti*, 86 Ill. App. 3d at 531, 408 N.E.2d at 735. The appellate court disagreed with the respondent mother and held a general finding of unfitness "is sufficient to sustain the judgment herein, where the petition alleges her unfitness, the specific grounds therefor are set forth with particularity, and the evidence in the record clearly and convincingly supports the judgment." *Grotti*, 86 Ill. App. 3d at 531-32, 408 N.E.2d at 736.

¶ 75 The decision in *Grotti* is consistent with the precedent showing we may affirm the decision of a trial court on any basis shown by the record. See, e.g., *In re Brianna B.*, 334 Ill. App. 3d 651, 655, 778 N.E.2d 724, 728 (2002). We question whether it is necessary the record

clearly and convincingly support the judgment, as *Grotti* finds. We generally review judgments as to parental fitness using the manifest-weight-of-the-evidence standard. See *In re T.A.*, 359 Ill. App. 3d 953, 960, 835 N.E.2d 908, 913 (2005). Thomas does not mention *Grotti* in her appeal, and the record establishes the trial court in this case should be affirmed under either standard. However, we will follow *Grotti* and its stricter standard-of-review here.

¶ 76 In this case, requirements set forth in *Grotti* are met. The termination petition alleges Thomas was an unfit parent to Time. W. and Timo. W. The termination sets forth grounds supporting a parental-unfitness finding with particularity: (1) she failed to make reasonable progress toward the children's return within any 9-month period after the neglect adjudication, specifically from July 13, 2010, through April 13, 2011; and (2) she failed to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the children's welfare (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2010)). The evidence clearly and convincingly supports the trial court's judgment.

¶ 77 The first ground for a finding of parental unfitness alleged by the State was that Thomas failed to make reasonable progress toward the children's return during the nine-month period of July 13, 2010, and April 13, 2011. Courts examine reasonable progress based on an objective standard. See *In re Jordan V.*, 347 Ill. App. 3d 1057, 1067, 808 N.E.2d 596, 605 (2004). A finding of reasonable progress necessitates, at a minimum, measurable or demonstrable movement toward the goal of returning the children to the parent's custody. See *In re Daphnie E.*, 368 Ill. App. 3d 1052, 1067, 859 N.E.2d 123, 137 (2006). A court should consider the parent's compliance with court directives and service plans in light of the condition giving rise to the child's removal and other conditions that later become known and would prevent the

court from returning custody to the parent. *In re C.N.*, 196 Ill. 2d 181, 216-17, 752 N.E.2d 1030, 1050 (2001). Progress will be found reasonable when a trial court can find it will be able to return the child to parental custody in the near future because the parent will have complied fully with court directives. *A.L.*, 409 Ill. App. 3d at 500, 949 N.E.2d at 1129, (quoting *In re L.L.S.*, 218 Ill. App. 3d 444, 461, 577 N.E.2d 1375, 1387 (1991)).

¶ 78 The evidence clearly and convincingly supports the trial court's decision. Thomas's participation in parenting sessions was minimal. She completed the parenting sessions with an incomplete understanding of the concepts taught in the class and of how to apply those concepts to parenting. Thomas was reluctant to participate in counseling, not open with her counselor on issues, particularly on issues of substance abuse. Thomas could not complete counseling sessions because of a positive screen for marijuana near the end of the nine-month period. Thomas demonstrated a complete lack of understanding regarding her children's health issues, believing the kidney issues were blown out of proportion and Time. W. was not developmentally delayed. Thomas did not comply with the service plans and trial court's directives to insure Time. W. and Timo. W. get the care they need. Thomas's progress was unreasonable. There is no indication Thomas would be ready in the near future to comply fully with the court's directives.

¶ 79 We find the evidence establishes parental unfitness on the lack-of-reasonable-progress ground, and need not consider the State's other allegations of unfitness. See *In re Donald A.G.*, 221 Ill. 2d 234, 244, 850 N.E.2d 172, 177 (2006) (noting only one statutory ground need be proved to establish parental unfitness).

¶ 80 Washington's sole argument on appeal is the trial court erroneously found

termination of his parental rights was in Time. W.'s and Timo. W.'s best interests. Washington emphasizes his love for his children and the bond with them. Washington stresses his children's affection for him. Washington maintains any intellectual and cultural differences in his approach to parenting, even if inferior to those articulated by LSSI, "can be bridged by information, education, and time."

¶ 81 After a trial court finds a parent unfit, it shifts its focus to the child's interests. In *re D.T.*, 212 Ill. 2d 347, 364, 818 N.E.2d 1214, 1227 (2004). A "parent's interest in maintaining the parent-child relationship must yield to the child's interest in a stable, loving home life." *D.T.*, 212 Ill. 2d at 364, 818 N.E.2d at 1227. At a hearing on a child's best interests, before a parent's parental rights may be terminated, the State must prove by a preponderance of the evidence it is in the child's best interests those rights be terminated. See *D.T.*, 212 Ill. 2d at 366, 818 N.E.2d at 1228. We will not disturb a finding terminating parental rights unless it is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *T.A.*, 359 Ill. App. 3d at 960, 835 N.E.2d at 913.

¶ 82 The trial court's conclusion is not against the manifest weight of the evidence. *Time. W. and Timo. W.* were taken into foster care in September 2009, when they were approximately 20 months old. Almost 2 1/2 years passed since the children's removal from the home before the parents' rights were terminated. Despite this time and the resources offered to Washington, the evidence shows he continued to be unable to offer his children security or stability. Washington did not participate in counseling to address his substance-abuse issues. Washington continued to use drugs. Washington had not even made himself available to be reached by telephone.

¶ 83 In contrast, *Time. W. and Timo. W.* were placed in a home that offered stability,

security, and permanence. Their fragile health conditions were given the attention they deserved.

In the care of the foster parent, Time. W.'s and Timo. W.'s health had stabilized.

¶ 84

III. CONCLUSION

¶ 85

For the stated reasons, we affirm the trial court's judgment.

¶ 86

Affirmed.