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2014 IL App (4th) 131018-U  
NO. 4-13-1018  
IN THE APPELLATE COURT  
OF ILLINOIS  
FOURTH DISTRICT

**FILED**  
April 22, 2014  
Carla Bender  
4<sup>th</sup> District Appellate  
Court, IL

In re: S.A. and D.A., Minors, )  
THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, )  
Petitioner-Appellee, )  
v. )  
TANYA ALEXANDER, )  
Respondent-Appellant. )  
Appeal from )  
Circuit Court of )  
McLean County )  
No. 12JA55 )  
Honorable )  
Kevin P. Fitzgerald, )  
Judge Presiding. )

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PRESIDING JUSTICE APPLETON delivered the judgment of the court.  
Justice Knecht concurred in the judgment.  
Justice Pope specially concurred.

**ORDER**

¶ 1 *Held:* The trial court's finding was not against the manifest weight of the evidence when it held the State had sufficiently proved respondent was unfit for failing to make reasonable progress toward the return of the minors within nine months following adjudication of neglect.

¶ 2 Respondent, Tanya Alexander, appeals the trial court's judgment terminating her parental rights to her two minor children. She claims the court's findings of unfitness were manifestly erroneous. We determine the State sufficiently proved at least one ground of unfitness, that is, she failed to make reasonable progress toward the return of the minors to her care during the initial nine-month period following the adjudication of neglect. We affirm.

¶ 3 **I. BACKGROUND**

¶ 4 In July 2012, police executed a search warrant at respondent's brother's home in LeRoy, Illinois, looking for evidence of drug activity. The home, a two-bedroom mobile home,

was occupied by 7 children, including S.A. and D.A. (twins born on September 24, 2009), and a total of 11 people as follows: respondent and her five children, her husband D'andre and his son, and respondent's brother and sister-in-law and their child. D'andre, also the father of S.A. and D.A., was arrested for possession of drugs. Though the proceedings addressed both respondent and D'andre, he is not a party to this appeal. The children were taken into protective custody because representatives from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) found the condition of the trailer unsuitable. S.A. and D.A. were placed together in a traditional foster home.

¶ 5 The State filed a petition for adjudication of wardship, alleging S.A. and D.A. were neglected minors pursuant to sections 2-3(1)(a) and (1)(b) of the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 (Juvenile Court Act) (705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(a), (1)(b) (West 2012)). Specifically, the State alleged the minors (1) were not receiving the proper care necessary for their well-being (705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(a) (West 2012)), and (2) were living in an environment injurious to their welfare due to respondent's unresolved issues of substance abuse (705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(b) (West 2012)).

¶ 6 On August 8, 2012, the trial court entered an adjudicatory order after respondent admitted the allegations set forth in the first count, namely that the minors were neglected because they were not receiving the proper care necessary for their well-being. On September 18, 2012, the court entered a dispositional order, finding respondent unfit to care for the minors because she "needs individual counseling, to complete substance-abuse treatment, to maintain sobriety, to obtain and then maintain appropriate housing, and to obtain and maintain employment. She continues to minimize the neglect the minors have endured." The court made the minors wards of the court and awarded custody and guardianship to DCFS.

¶ 7 On July 26, 2013, the State filed a petition to terminate respondent's parental rights, alleging respondent was unfit because she (1) failed to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the minors' welfare (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2012)); (2) failed to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for the removal of the minors from respondent during any nine-month period following the adjudication of neglect (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(i) (West 2012)); and (3) failed to make reasonable progress toward the return of the minors during the initial nine-month period following the adjudication of neglect (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(ii) (West 2012)).

¶ 8 The trial court conducted the fitness hearing over the course of two days, beginning on September 25, 2013. The State called Colleen Rychlewski, a therapist at Chestnut Health Systems, who testified she had first met respondent on September 5, 2012, during a mental-health assessment. According to Rychlewski, DCFS was "concerned about depression." Rychlewski completed the assessment on September 12, 2012, and determined respondent would "absolutely" benefit from individual therapy twice per month. Respondent suffered from anxiety due to her children and her marriage. Apparently, D'andre was living with another woman. Respondent and D'andre had separated after the children were taken into foster care. Respondent attended a total of six therapy sessions, after cancelling one (September 13, 2012) and failing to appear at two (September 21, 2012, and October 5, 2012). During the fourth session in October 2012, respondent informed Rychlewski she was moving to Rockford, Illinois, for a job opportunity. Respondent assured Rychlewski she would keep in contact with the caseworker to arrange visits with the minors and to continue working on her case plan. Respondent specifically indicated she would resume therapy in Rockford. Rychlewski said respondent told her she was "motivated to change."

¶ 9 Rychlewski testified she had reviewed respondent's evaluation performed by Rosecrance Institute in March 2013. The evaluator recommended no treatment. Rychlewski said she was "surprised" by the recommendation, but she indicated the evaluation seemed "incomplete." Respondent had apparently failed to advise the evaluator she had recently participated in therapy. She also apparently failed to tell the evaluator she was living in a single motel room with D'andre and his girlfriend. In Rychlewski's opinion, the minors should not be returned to respondent without her engaging in treatment.

¶ 10 Rychlewski testified she and respondent discussed the concept of "environmental neglect" since that was one of the reasons the minors were taken into care in this case as well as in 2010. Respondent "absolutely" needed counseling on how to maintain a safe and clean environment for the minors. However, according to Rychlewski, when discussing why the minors were taken into care, respondent understood the issue relating to drugs in the home, but she denied the home was dirty or unsafe.

¶ 11 The State also called Kendra Helferich, the DCFS caseworker assigned to the case between July 2012 and April 2013. Helferich prepared the case plans and determined the goals based upon the integrated assessment prepared on July 27, 2012. Respondent was to (1) maintain stable mental and emotional health through treatment, (2) achieve and maintain a stable, clean, and appropriate residence, (3) maintain employment, and (4) abstain from drugs and alcohol. Helferich said she had recommended at the dispositional hearing that respondent be found unfit because she had been the subject of four prior indicated reports for inadequate supervision and environmental neglect, the first in July 2010. According to Helferich, the minors were removed from respondent's care in August 2010 and returned in August 2011. Another indicated report was made in September 2011, and an intact case was opened in

December 2011. Helderich said the issues accompanying those reports had not been completely resolved. In Helderich's opinion, respondent required "extensive therapy."

¶ 12 Helderich said respondent spoke of her anxiety relating to D'andre and his girlfriend. He had left respondent to be with his girlfriend, but returned to respondent in March 2012, though he kept in contact with his girlfriend because he was afraid she would harm herself. The three of them resided together in a motel at the time of the hearing. Respondent moved to Rockford in November 2012; however, due to staffing issues, the case was not transferred until April 2013. The children traveled twice a month for visitation to meet respondent part way in LaSalle. Respondent did not miss any visits with the children. Once respondent moved, DCFS referred respondent to Rosecrance for a mental-health assessment. Respondent told Helderich she understood she would need to re-engage in services in Rockford, as she had made initial progress in Bloomington in terms of her individual therapy. The caseworkers and respondent had a child and family team meeting on December 19, 2012, but respondent had not yet submitted to a mental-health assessment.

¶ 13 Helderich testified she rated respondent's progress on her mental-health goal in January 2013 as "unsatisfactory" because she had not re-engaged in individual therapy or participated in an assessment. She was rated "satisfactory" on her substance-abuse goal because she had completed Level 1 outpatient treatment in October 2012. Her provider rated her prognosis as fair and recommended she attend Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings to maintain her sobriety. Although she was not attending meetings, Helderich nevertheless gave her "satisfactory" rating because respondent "was, by all accounts, free of drugs and alcohol, and she had completed primary treatment and was living a drug and alcohol free lifestyle at that time."

¶ 14 In terms of respondent's appropriate-housing goal, Helferich rated her progress as "unsatisfactory" because respondent did not have a stable residence and was either homeless, living in various motels, or with friends. When she lived with D'andre and his girlfriend in one motel room, Helferich tried to explain to respondent the inappropriateness of such a situation. She explained it demonstrated "poor boundaries and wasn't a good example for the children." Helferich also explained it was not healthy for respondent's mental health. Respondent said they could not afford more than one room, as they needed "to pool their resources." Helferich also rated respondent as "unsatisfactory" on her goal of obtaining and maintaining employment. Respondent had not worked since July 2012.

¶ 15 Helferich stopped working as the family caseworker in April 2013. Youth Services Bureau became the caseworker for respondent's case. Still respondent had not (1) obtained employment, (2) obtained housing, (3) engaged in mental-health therapy, or (4) attended NA or AA meetings. Helferich and respondent attended a child and family team meeting on April 5, 2013. By that time, respondent had participated in the mental-health assessment at Rosecrance though the evaluator had recommended no treatment. However, Helferich and other DCFS employees advised respondent she would still need to participate in treatment and obtain another assessment. Respondent disagreed but indicated she would do "what she needed to do to get her kids back."

¶ 16 Helferich said the Rosecrance evaluator only relied on respondent's self-reporting. Thus, she had no way of verifying whether the information reported was accurate. Because Rosecrance has a "different evaluation process" than other DCFS providers, in that it does not accept referral packets, Helferich did not forward the integrated assessment or other documents to assist with respondent's evaluation. According to Helferich, the information relied upon by

the Rosecrance evaluator was "incomplete." For example, there was no mention of the condition of the home when the minors were removed and no mention of respondent's history with DCFS. Further, there was no mention respondent had recently been involved in therapy. However, the evaluator recommended respondent follow up with Crusader Clinic for her mental-health medication needs. Respondent did so. Helderich testified respondent had been involved with Rosecrance in 2010 and 2011 when she was previously involved with DCFS in the Rockford area.

¶ 17 Lynn Palmer, caseworker with Youth Service Bureau, testified her agency took over the family case in April 2013. She met with respondent at the motel in May 2013. Respondent agreed she would need to be forthright with her mental-health professional about her depression and anxiety. Respondent understood she would need to reveal she was currently taking medication. By the time Palmer left as the caseworker at the end of July 2013, respondent had not returned to Rosecrance. D'andre and his girlfriend moved from the motel into a home and respondent soon moved in with them. However, respondent did not want to have visitation with the children in the home because of the girlfriend and the substance abuse that occurred.

¶ 18 Palmer testified respondent did not engage in counseling in Rockford or attend any AA or NA meetings. Further, she did not have a job. As of May 8, 2013, Palmer could not have recommended a finding that respondent was a fit parent, nor was she able to recommend the minors return home in the near future. Palmer also said she could not have recommended unsupervised visitation. On May 15, 2013, respondent was placed on a waiting list for a counselor with the Youth Service Bureau, but had also been advised to return to Rosecrance for counseling services there. Palmer described Rosecrance's assessment procedure as more crisis oriented. She explained the evaluators are geared to recognize self-harm or acute medical issues.

Otherwise, it is up to the parent to honestly advise the evaluator about the issues she needs to address.

¶ 19 Palmer said respondent told her she had secured a telemarketing position in July 2013, but Palmer was not able to verify the employment. Respondent advised she was discharged from that position within a few months. Palmer also said she discussed with respondent her living arrangements as being detrimental to the possibility of the return of the minors to her care. She explained to respondent that, even if she participated in services, it would count against her if she was living with D'andre when he was not engaged in services. Palmer suggested respondent move into a shelter or crisis center, but she refused. The only person employed in the home was D'andre's girlfriend, so it was she who was maintaining the residence. Palmer also stressed to respondent the importance of returning to Rosecrance for a new evaluation and individual therapy. However, respondent had not done so.

¶ 20 Jordyn Jenkins, a foster care caseworker at Youth Service Bureau, testified she became the family caseworker in July 2013. She met respondent for the first time on September 6, 2013. She spoke with respondent about moving out of the home and into a shelter, but respondent refused. She also spoke with respondent about participating in individual therapy. Respondent told Jenkins she knew she needed to return to Rosecrance for a new, more reliable assessment. She also told Jenkins she was not ready to divorce D'andre. She lived with him and his girlfriend because she had no other place to live. Jenkins thought a finding of fitness would be at least one year away, because respondent had not "completed anything within the past, since [she] moved in November." However, Jenkins acknowledged respondent had been consistent with visitation. Jenkins also said respondent told her she had been "very diligent" about her job search. Jenkins asked for verification, but respondent did not provide any.

¶ 21 The State rested. Respondent testified on her own behalf. She said she first became involved with DCFS in July 2010 when the minors were removed for inadequate supervision and environmental neglect. She was living in Rockford at the time. The children were returned in six months, after she participated in parenting classes, a drug assessment, and group counseling at Rosecrance. In July 2011, DCFS removed the minors again due to the condition of her home, but the removal was only for a short time. An intact case was opened. Her brother offered to help her if she and her children moved to LeRoy, so she agreed. DCFS inspected the home in December 2011, authorized the arrangement, and closed the case. Her next involvement with DCFS was in July 2012 when this case was opened.

¶ 22 Between February 2012 and July 2012, respondent was employed at Freedom Gas Station in LeRoy. She was fired after she came to work after drinking alcohol and was involved in an altercation at the gas station between D'andre and another customer. She was next employed in June 2013 in Rockford at Serv-A-Com, a telemarketing center. She was terminated in August 2013 for not meeting her quota. After she was terminated, she collected unemployment and public aid.

¶ 23 Respondent explained she moved to Rockford in November 2012 and lived in a friend's apartment. The friend moved out, leaving respondent with the apartment, but the landlord would not let respondent stay. In December 2012, respondent moved between motels and her brother's car. She found an inexpensive motel and stayed there until February or March 2013. She moved into a room with D'andre and his girlfriend in April or May 2013. They all moved into a home in June or July 2013, where, at the time of the hearing, they continued to reside.

¶ 24 With regard to her substance-abuse goal, respondent said she did not realize she was required to attend AA or NA meetings. She believed she would attend only if she needed support to stay sober. She said she had not used any substances since the day the minors were removed. Addressing her mental-health issues, respondent testified that, after the minors were removed, she was able to obtain the necessary medication for her mental-health issues through Chestnut Behavioral System. She continues to take her medication as prescribed.

¶ 25 Respondent addressed the issue of individual therapy or counseling. She enjoyed attending counseling in Bloomington and knew she needed to continue after she moved to Rockford. However, transportation became an issue and, at first, she was concentrating on finding employment. During her assessment in March 2013, she insisted she had advised the evaluator she had been involved in counseling and suffered from depression. However, she also explained to the evaluator she did not need counseling, as she "was feeling better than [she] had in a long time." She could not recall whether she mentioned her "housing situation." She said she told the evaluator she was unemployed and was taking medication. She also said she had described her marital relationship and had told the evaluator she had been to Rosecrance in the past.

¶ 26 After she received the results of her evaluation, stating she was not required to participate in therapy, the caseworker advised her she needed to return for another assessment. Respondent said she was honest with the evaluator, and there was nothing more to tell them at a second evaluation.

¶ 27 Respondent acknowledged she knew that if she were to stay with D'andre, who was not participating in services, she would not get the minors returned to her care. She explained she was not "with" D'andre, as they were separated and he was in a relationship with

his girlfriend. Respondent said she lived with them only to "save money." She said she did not recall the court advising her to attend AA or NA meetings. "[O]therwise, [she] would have already had it done."

¶ 28 The trial court continued the case until October 1, 2013, for the presentation of arguments and recommendations. After considering the evidence and arguments of counsel, the trial court held the State had sufficiently proved respondent was unfit on the grounds stated in the petition to terminate. The court said it "just boggles the mind" why respondent would reside with D'andre and his girlfriend. The court described it as the most "unhealthy place to live when you've got these, got depression issues." When addressing the nine-month period of August 8, 2012, to May 8, 2013, the court found respondent had made satisfactory progress with regard to her substance-abuse goal, but had not done so with regard to her counseling ("which she desperately needs"), employment, or housing goals. The court said it "probably would have been the better practice" to forward Rosecrance a referral package before respondent's assessment. The court also found it noteworthy that respondent did not participate in an assessment until the end of March 2013, when she had moved to Rockford in November 2012. Further, the court noted respondent would need to address her underlying depression and mental-health issues before the minors could be returned to her care.

¶ 29 After finding respondent unfit, the trial court immediately proceeded to the best-interest hearing. The court reviewed the best-interest report, which indicated S.A. and D.A., along with their half brother, had resided together in the same foster home since July 9, 2012. According to the report, the children refer to their foster parents as "mom and dad." They show affection, giving their parents hugs and kisses. They seem to be comfortable and secure in the home. The foster parents have indicated a willingness to provide permanency to the minors in

the form of adoption. S.A. had indicated to the caseworker that she did not like attending visits because she fears she will not be able to return to her foster home. D.A. is less able to express himself due to his diagnosis of autism. Though D.A. has expressed his displeasure with visits, stating the visits were not his, but only S.A.'s and his half brother's visits. The caseworker was unable to determine further what D.A. meant. Both minors have shown positive interactions with their teachers at school, as D.A. has shown improvement engaging with other students. They attend church on Sundays and have made friends there. The foster family is providing a stable, secure, and loving environment for them. According to the report, DCFS recommended the minors remain together and permanently in their foster home.

¶ 30 The trial court considered the testimony of Carina Beaty, a specialized foster-care caseworker at The Baby Fold. Beaty said she had worked as the caseworker for the minors for the past 60 days. She prepared the best-interest report. She testified that she has only seen the foster father interact with the minors on Sundays at church, as he was at work when she visited the home during the week. Beaty said she attends the same church as the foster family. In Beaty's opinion, it would be in the minors' best interests if respondent's parental rights were terminated so the minors could achieve permanency and stability.

¶ 31 Heather Snyder, the minors' foster parent, testified the minors have been placed in her home since July 9, 2012. She said she has four children in her home: the minors' half brother (D'andre's son), who is seven years old; a biological daughter, who is four years old; and D.A. and S.A., four-year-old twins. Snyder is a stay-at-home mom and married to Anthony Snyder, who works full time as an accountant. Snyder said her husband has a "great relationship" with all the children. She described him as their "playmate." She said: "From the time he gets home until they go to bed, he's with them." She said Anthony and the children are

very affectionate toward each other and the siblings all get along well. Besides autism, D.A. has been diagnosed with epilepsy, hyptonia, and receptive language disorder. He participates in therapy at home, which the foster parents provide without reimbursement. He goes to Peoria every four to six months for regular check-ups for his epilepsy. He takes medication twice daily for epilepsy. D.A. has aids at home which help him cope, including a beanbag chair, a weighted blanket, and ear covers for loud noises. As for S.A., she attends counseling weekly. Snyder said she believes S.A. may suffer from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Oppositional Defiant Disorder, but she has not been positively diagnosed. Her therapist believes S.A. will continue to struggle "until the situation changes" or until "she has more stability." S.A.'s negative behaviors, such as defiance, "amp up around visits." According to her therapist, unless visits are stopped, S.A. cannot become emotionally stable. On occasion, S.A. has told Snyder she does not want to visit respondent, yet on other occasions, she has expressed her desire to attend. Snyder confirmed she and Anthony are willing to adopt the minors. If they are allowed to adopt, they intend to maintain contact with the minors' siblings and limited contact with respondent, which could increase as the minors get older. Snyder testified she has done research regarding "transracial adoptions" and is willing to incorporate appropriate cultural experiences into their life.

¶ 32 Anthony Snyder testified consistently with his wife's testimony. He too expressed his commitment to care for the minors forever, including providing them with the care necessary for their special needs.

¶ 33 Respondent testified on her own behalf. She said she and the children show mutual love and affection toward each other. She said the minors are very excited to see her during visits and are very bonded to her. She wants to care for her children and knows she is

able to do so. Although she is struggling financially, she is "trying every day really hard to find a job." She said the services she has been provided have "fixed" her. She has done things "to be a better person to be a good mom." During counseling, she learned coping skills for her depression and she is now more "motivated to get up and do things," "just to be a better person." She said: "My children need me, and I need my children. I love my children. Like I said, I'm working on trying to get financially back on my feet to get a place to live. I can take care of my children. I made a mistake and I fixed that. And I want my children back, and I love my children."

¶ 34 After considering the evidence and recommendations of counsel, the trial court noted it considered the physical safety and welfare of the minors, including food, shelter, health, and clothing as a primary factor favoring termination. The court described respondent's household as chaotic and unstable. The court believed the minors' biracial characteristics favored "non-termination," while the minors' "background and ties, including familial, cultural, and religious," were neutral factors, as were the minors' "sense of attachment, including where [they] actually feel[] love, attachment, and a sense of being valued" and the continuity of affection. The minors' sense of security and stability, the least-disruptive placement, and their community ties, including church, school, and friends, were factors favoring termination. The court found the Snyders were in a better position to provide for the minors' special needs. The court noted the most important factor for consideration was the minors' need for stability and permanency.

¶ 35 The trial court noted respondent's "little bit of counseling she had wasn't enough even to make progress," as demonstrated by respondent's decision regarding her living arrangements. The court found the State had proved by "at least a preponderance of the

evidence," it was in the minors' best interests that respondent's parental rights be terminated. This appeal followed.

¶ 36

## II. ANALYSIS

¶ 37

Respondent claims the trial court erred in finding the State had sufficiently proved respondent was unfit on the grounds alleged. The court found respondent was unfit for failing to (1) maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the minors' welfare (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2012)), (2) make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for the removal of the minors from respondent's care (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(i) (West 2012)), and (3) make reasonable progress toward the return of the minors within the initial nine-month period following adjudication (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(ii) (West 2012)).

¶ 38

The Juvenile Court Act (705 ILCS 405/1-1 to 7-1 (West 2012)) provides a two-step process for the termination of parental rights. *In re C.W.*, 199 Ill. 2d 198, 210 (2002). First, the State must prove the parent is unfit as defined in section 1(D) of the Adoption Act. 750 ILCS 50/1(D) (West 2012); *C.W.*, 199 Ill. 2d at 210. Because the termination of parental rights constitutes a complete severance of the parent-child relationship, proof of parental unfitness must be clear and convincing. *In re C.N.*, 196 Ill. 2d 181, 208 (2001). Only if the court makes a finding of unfitness will the court proceed to consider whether it is in the best interest of the child to terminate parental rights. 705 ILCS 405/2-29(2) (West 2012); *C.W.*, 199 Ill. 2d at 210. Because the trial court is in the best position to assess the credibility of witnesses, a reviewing court may reverse a trial court's finding of unfitness only when it is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *C.N.*, 196 Ill. 2d at 208. A finding is against the manifest weight of the evidence where the opposite conclusion is clearly evident. *C.N.*, 196 Ill. 2d at 208.

¶ 39 We address first the ground alleging respondent failed to make reasonable progress toward the return of the minors. Section 1(D)(m)(ii) of the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(ii) (West 2012)) provides that a parent may be declared unfit if she fails "to make reasonable progress toward the return of the child to the parent within [nine] months after an adjudication of neglected or abused minor." "Reasonable progress may be found when the court, based upon the evidence, can conclude a parent's progress is sufficiently demonstrable and is of such a quality that the child can be returned to the parent in the near future." *In re K.P.*, 305 Ill. App. 3d 175, 180 (1999). Reasonable progress has been defined as "measurable or demonstrable movement toward the goal of reunification." *K.P.*, 305 Ill. App. 3d at 180. "[T]he benchmark for measuring a parent's 'progress toward the return of the child' under section 1(D)(m) of the Adoption Act encompasses the parent's compliance with the service plans and the court's directives, in light of the condition which gave rise to the removal of the child, and in light of other conditions which later became known and which would prevent the court from returning custody of the child to the parent." *C.N.*, 196 Ill. 2d at 216-17.

¶ 40 "[T]he date on which to begin assessing a parent's \*\*\* progress is the date the trial court enters its order adjudging the minor neglected \*\*\*." *In re D.F.*, 208 Ill. 2d 223, 243 (2003). In this case, August 8, 2012, was the date the trial court adjudged the minors to be neglected. Therefore, the initial nine-month period was from August 8, 2012, to May 8, 2013.

¶ 41 According to respondent's case plan, she was to address issues regarding substance abuse, mental health, housing, and employment. Although respondent completed outpatient substance-abuse treatment in October 2012, she failed to participate in AA or NA meetings as recommended by her treatment provider. Nevertheless, her caseworker rated her progress as "satisfactory" on this task because respondent "was, by all accounts, free of drugs

and alcohol, and she had completed primary treatment and was living a drug and alcohol free lifestyle at that time."

¶ 42            However, her successful participation toward completion on her remaining tasks never progressed. Between September 2012 and November 2012, respondent began making progress on her goal of addressing her mental health. She participated in a mental-health assessment and thereafter, attended six counseling sessions addressing her depression and anxiety. Her counselor, Colleen Rychlewski, testified respondent attended four counseling sessions in a row, which indicated to her "a pretty good sign of [respondent] wanting to change." Rychlewski advised respondent it was imperative for her to resume counseling once she moved to Rockford. Respondent said she understood. However, respondent did not participate in an assessment in Rockford until March 2013, delaying that task for four months. Any sign of progress she had made in the fall of 2012 was nullified upon her move to Rockford. Not only did she fail to address her mental health through counseling, she placed herself in an unhealthy environment by residing with her husband, from whom she was separated, and his girlfriend in the same motel room, and later, in the same house.

¶ 43            When respondent finally participated in an assessment at Rosecrance in Rockford in March 2013, the evaluator determined no treatment was necessary. Because her caseworker knew respondent definitely needed counseling, she determined the assessment was based on inaccurate and/or incomplete information. The caseworker advised respondent she would need to participate in another assessment, but respondent failed to do so.

¶ 44            Respondent's living situation not only abrogated the initial progress she had made toward her mental-health goal, but it also negated her housing goal as well. She failed to make any progress toward obtaining suitable housing for herself and her children. When she was not

living in a motel, she had secured temporary arrangements with friends or slept in her brother's car. Of course, it is reasonable to assume she was unable to obtain suitable housing because she failed to make reasonable progress on her final goal of obtaining and maintaining suitable employment.

¶ 45 During the relevant nine-month period, between August 8, 2012, and May 8, 2013, we cannot say respondent made reasonable progress toward the return of the minors. Instead, she failed to demonstrate her willingness to progress toward the goals set for her in her case plans and directives. She seemingly disregarded those goals, choosing instead to remain in a relationship, romantic or otherwise, with D'andre, which subjected respondent to a mentally and emotionally unhealthy environment. Respondent cannot place herself in this unhealthy environment, while at the same time choosing not to participate in her DCFS recommended goals, and claim she made progress toward the return of her children. She failed to address her mental-health issues with therapy, failed to obtain and maintain suitable employment, and failed to obtain suitable independent housing. Thus, we conclude the trial court did not err in determining respondent was unfit for failing to make reasonable progress toward the return of the minors to her care within the initial nine-month period following adjudication.

¶ 46 Because (1) only one ground properly proved is sufficient to enter a finding of unfitness (*C.W.*, 199 Ill. 2d at 210), and (2) respondent does not challenge the trial court's best-interest finding, our analysis ends here. Therefore, we affirm the court's judgment terminating respondent's parental rights.

¶ 47 III. CONCLUSION

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

¶ 49 Affirmed.

¶ 50 JUSTICE POPE, specially concurring.

¶ 51 While I agree the trial court decision should be affirmed, I write separately because of my frustration with DCFS and their contract agencies in this case, as well as others we review on a regular basis. In this case, respondent had three different caseworkers assigned to her in one 12-month period. When she moved to Rockford, she discussed with her caseworker the need to continue counseling. Respondent was referred to Rosecrance for an assessment. At oral argument, the State conceded respondent was promised a bus pass so she could attend her assessment and counseling. She did not receive the bus pass for four months. The delay in obtaining an assessment is then used as a basis for finding lack of progress. As soon as respondent received the bus pass, she obtained the assessment. This assessment determined respondent did not need further counseling. Respondent is then faulted for not providing complete and accurate information to Rosecrance because, according to DCFS, if she had done so, counseling would have been recommended. However, DCFS never provided *any* information to Rosecrance about the case or the reason for its referral. Neither the integrated assessment nor the service plan was provided to Rosecrance by DCFS or any other agency involved in the referral. Rosecrance recommended respondent follow up with Crusader Clinic for her medication needs and respondent did so.

¶ 52 It seems to me, at a minimum, if DCFS refers a client to an agency for services, it should communicate, in writing, with that agency about the reason for the referral, as well as any background information it deems helpful for a full and accurate assessment. There are so many obstacles for these needy families to overcome in order to achieve reunification, it is counterproductive when the agencies themselves create additional, unnecessary obstacles for these families.