

Theo

Male, 11

Caregiver: Grandmother

Theo is a physically healthy 11-year-old boy who was hospitalized earlier this month. Theo lives with his grandmother, who has raised him from infancy. Theo has always been close to his father, who also lived in the apartment until six months ago, when he was incarcerated for assaulting a police officer. Theo did not see this incident. Theo has never known his mother, who left the family when he was born. Theo's grandmother reports that she knows Theo's mother to be addicted to meth and living on the street, and that Theo may have been exposed to drugs in utero.

Since his father's incarceration, Theo's behavior has continually deteriorated. His emotions have been somewhat blunted, but he also has been periodically threatening toward his grandmother at home and toward some of his teachers at school. Theo was bused daily by his school district to a special education setting because he has an IQ of 70 and exhibits very mild delays in motor skills and speech. Until this semester, Theo was doing well in this setting and seemed to enjoy school a great deal. About three weeks ago, Theo attacked one of his teachers after she asked him to return to his seat; school support workers had to intervene to deescalate and keep Theo from trying to hurt his teacher. After this incident, Theo was hospitalized at the closest inpatient child psychiatric unit. Theo's school principal reported that school staff is afraid of Theo and he will not be readmitted to school when he is discharged from the hospital.

Theo has always had close, loving relationships with his grandmother and his father. The family lives in an apartment building in a city, and Theo's two aunts and five cousins all live nearby. The family is supportive of each other, and Theo's aunts and older cousins help get him ready for school, take him to fun activities, and watch him after school when Theo's grandmother is still at work. Until recently, Theo has gotten along well with his same-aged cousins, whom he has known all his life.

Theo's grandmother reports that he began threatening to "hit," "hurt," or "get" his cousins and her intermittently about six weeks ago. She says that small things, like one of his cousins asking for a toy or her asking him to sit up at the table, seemed to trigger these threats, and that she was not sure how to handle this because she never had trouble with Theo's behavior before. She also reports that Theo had taken to spending time sitting alone in a corner of the apartment rocking back and forth with an angry look on his face. Grandmother is feeling quite stressed about what is happening, and her daughters are now expressing concern about the safety of their children. Grandmother is stressed about the possibility her daughters will refuse to care for Theo while she is at work.

Grandmother reports that it has been harder, recently, to get Theo interested in doing the many things that he used to like to do in his free time. The family has always participated in the neighborhood community garden, for example, and Theo always enjoyed helping with the garden chores. He did not want to go to the garden with her in recent weeks, saying that the people at the garden are "mean" to him.

Theo's Grandmother reached out to her local community based service agency after the school told her about waiver support services, because she does not want Theo in a restrictive placement and is willing to support any home-based treatment plan that will help him return safely home. She is committed to getting Theo home as quickly as possible and feels that as soon as his aggression is stabilized, she wants him discharged.

When interviewed, Theo reports that he is feeling scared a lot of the time, because people are "being mean" to him and "saying things to him" all the time. Hospital staff report that Theo is very quiet and keeps to himself. He will talk to staff when approached directly, and willingly sits with the academic tutor each day, but he seems guarded and gives them one-word answers to most questions. Theo tries to stay away from peers, and if they interact with him, he tells them to 'get away from me.' Theo has not exhibited any violence since his arrival. When questioned by the unit social worker he reported that he thinks some of the staff is "trying to get me in trouble."