**Suggested Families First Caregiver Client**

**Initial Interview Topics**

**Before meeting with your client(s), be sure you have reviewed her intake, any documents about the matter and the proposed contract for legal services.**

**The below topics are for an average caregiver representation matter and are not an exhaustive list of topics.**

* **Client’s goals/expectations**
  + **For the legal matter**
  + **For the child**
  + **If more than one client, do their wishes differ? How so?**
* **Background on child’s parents/prior caregivers**
  + **Child’s caregiver history from birth to present**
  + **Client’s assessment of child’s relationship with other parties in the case**
  + **Concerns and basis for concerns about child’s safety/wellbeing with each potential caregiver/party to the custody/adoption/guardianship matter**
  + **Current relationship between client and other parties in the case and whether consent is anticipated**
  + **Client’s knowledge of or involvement in any prior or current custody or neglect matters concerning the child**
  + **Client’s knowledge of any prior or current court matters (DV, criminal, CPO, etc.) involving the opposing parties**
* **Background on child(ren)**
  + **Date of Birth**
  + **Current age, grade, school or daycare, and IEP status**
  + **Any known medical or mental health conditions**
  + **Any known medical, dental, or mental health care providers for the child**
    - **Bring releases for these providers and go through them with your client**
  + **Any barriers/obstacles to client providing for child’s medical or educational needs**
  + **Child’s wishes with regard to custody/guardianship/adoption (esp. if 14 or older)**
  + **Child’s contact with siblings or parents**
* **Background information on client** 
  + **Confirm full name, prior names, address, date of birth, place of employment, income sources and amounts**
  + **Confirm members of household and their dates of birth**
  + **Confirm marital status**
  + **Confirm spouse’s participation in litigation**
  + **Date and circumstances under which child entered into or left client’s primary care**
  + **Ask if client has any criminal, CPS, or significant civil (e.g. bankruptcy, foreclosure) history in DC or MD**
    - **Discuss each incidence**
  + **Ask if client has any criminal or CPS history outside of DC or MD**
    - **Discuss each incidence**
  + **Discuss potential impact of any concerning background of client (criminal convictions/charges, history of substance abuse)**
  + **Ask if members of client’s household have any criminal or CPS history in DC, MD, or any other jurisdiction**
    - **Discuss each incident**
  + **Discuss potential impact of any concerning background of anyone living in client’s home**
  + **If child’s case is neglect involved, status of client’s licensure, barriers to licensure, and name of licensing agency and licensing worker**
* **Demographic information on all parties**
  + **Confirm from intake mother’s full name, age and dob, phone number, current or last known address, place of employment**
  + **Confirm from intake father’s full name, age and dob, phone number, current or last known address, place of employment**
  + **Confirm from intake intervenor’s full name, age and dob, phone number, current or last known address, place of employment**
  + **Additional demographic information as applicable**
* **Describe the legal process** 
  + **Overview of court process for client’s case**
  + **What your role as client’s counsel will be throughout the case**
    - **Communications with other parties to the case including the guardian ad litem and the social worker for neglect involved cases**
  + **What to expect of court generally and at next hearing**
  + **Pleadings that need to be filed, service of all parties, what you on behalf of client will have to prove to achieve her goal, court hearings client must attend, possible evidentiary hearings and trial where client would testify as witness**
  + **Discuss possible services/orders (home studies, evaluations, mediation, drug testing)**
  + **Discuss approximate length of case/court involvement**
  + **Discuss your anticipated next steps**
  + **Discuss and write down (to give to client) anticipated next steps for client (e.g. provide additional documents regarding care of child, provide dates of birth of other adults in household, track down mother’s last known address)**
* **Go over retainer agreement with client**
  + **Discuss each provision, emphasize client’s duties and obligations, answer any questions, provide client with a copy once signed**

**Other Useful Tips for Interviewing**

1. **Make client feel comfortable.**
2. **Ask questions but also try to have a conversation.**
3. **Make sure client is okay with you taking notes.**
4. **Be sure to ask for copies of any documents client may have related to the child or the case**
5. **Try to obtain specific dates for events and histories.**
6. **Always ask about the client’s reasoning for actions already taken and what they would like to be done in the future so you can strategize more carefully.**
7. **Check and double-check client’s understanding of your discussions.**
8. **Bring blank release forms to be signed by the client**