

Hello, my name is Ruby, and I am nine. We'll have to be quick because mum doesn't like me talking to people she doesn't know. She normally tells them I am out when they come, but she is asleep right now so we will have to be quiet, so we don't wake her. She often goes back to sleep in the morning after she's had her 'special medicine'. If mum has had too much special medicine, Phil makes breakfast for me and my little sister, Lucy, and he gets Lucy dressed. Phil shouts at mum sometimes because she won't get up. Phil isn't always around, so some days we are late for school and nursery. Lucy doesn't like Phil very much, but I think he's OK.

Do you know Susie? She's a social worker. She used to come and visit me and my sister in the old house. Mum didn't like her. She got cross after we went to that meeting at the council and Susie said I wasn't safe at home. I remember the big meeting. There were lots of grownups sat at a table and they were talking about me, my sister and my mum. They knew we weren't really happy. Some of the grownups had lots to say but some didn't say anything. The lady from Lucy's playschool didn't tell anyone that Lucy cries every day before she goes home, and that Phil takes her in most days. In the end, they decided that things weren't so bad and maybe it would be ok if mum went to some classes to learn how to look after us properly.

We moved to get away from Susie, but I liked her. She used to play games with me, and we talked about what I liked at school – I used to really like drawing and playing with my friends in the playground. Our old house must be a long way away as it took us all day to get here in the van with the furniture.

I am not allowed to have friends over to my house, but I used to be allowed to go to my friend's houses to play.

Darren came around the other day. I heard mum tell him I was at a party with my sister, but I wasn't – I was upstairs with Phil in our bedroom because mum didn't want him to see us. I think he was a social worker like Susie. I wonder if Darren spoke to Susie and if she told him how unhappy we were?

There is another lady that comes around; mum lets her in because she brings mum's special medicine which makes mum happy.

This is the kitchen in here. It's a bit tidier now. I tried to make mum a cake for her birthday last week and it didn't really work, but mum's nurse put this bandage on my arm because I burnt myself. She told mum to take me to the doctor if it didn't get better, but she hasn't and she helped me to tidy up.

UNDERSTANDING UNIDENTIFIED ADULTS CASE STUDY: RUBY

I thought there would be lots of questions because of the bandage on my arm, like last time but nobody has asked, and I don't want to get mum into trouble.

I haven't been happy for a long time, but nobody has asked me what I think. Mum always says her special medicine makes her happy so I thought I would try some. The first sip didn't make a difference, so I had a bigger drink. It made me feel poorly. I remember the ambulance coming and the ambulance man saying to my mum: "I'm sorry, we couldn't save her".

Questions

What are the issues for Ruby?

What was life like for her?

What were the opportunities to intervene?

Did professionals understand Phil's role within the family?

Does this raise any issues for your agencies practice?