

I was part of the team that went to Eldorado, April 22-25, 2008.

We arrived at the Coliseum area, went through security, and were briefed before entering the Coliseum where the women and children had been relocated. Upon entering the Coliseum it looked like a disaster scene, rows and rows of cots with the women and children's belongings in bags and piles surrounding them. Women and their children were sitting in groups, reading to their children, talking quietly, braiding their daughters hair, some sleeping and others just sitting looking concerned and very serious.

As I approached women the first question they asked was if I was a CPS worker. Upon speaking with the women they related stories and situations where they had been treated harshly, lied to, and not informed of information they felt was important to them: Where have you taken my children?, Who will pray with my children?, Do the people watching my child know they are not used to being talked to harshly and unkind?, Who will braid my daughters hair in the morning?, Do they understand that we eat a healthy diet? Will they allow my children to wear appropriate clothing? All questions that are reasonable and appropriate from mothers obviously worried about their children. My observation of the mothers' interaction with their children was one of love, warmth, and kindness. Not once did I hear an unkind word, yelling, or negative response to a child's behavior. I really feel these women could teach us all a lot about positive parenting. The women were friendly, even thanked us for our help and concern, but were devastated by what they could not understand about their treatment and the unknown reasons this was all happening to them. The children were the most well adjusted kids I have seen in a long time, playful, intelligent, courteous and active. Considering what was happening to these families I was amazed to see how the children were guided by their mothers to play nice, eat the food that was given to them, and be kind to the CPS workers.

CPS workers were everywhere, wearing green vests and name badges to identify them. As I was talking to a mother, her child spilled water down his front; he stood up on the cot so that she could wipe him off. A CPS worker strode over and told the mother, "You need to set him down, NOW." The woman nodded and continued to wipe his shirt. The CPS worker then said "If you don't sit him down NOW, I will set him down for you." At this point I mentioned to the worker that she was simply wiping him off, had a hold of him, and would sit him down as soon as this was done. The CPS worker glared at me and walked off. The mother whispered to me that "this is the way they always treat us, as if we don't know how to care for our own children, they won't even let our babies sleep with us."

This ordeal left me with a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach at the seeming injustice that has been inflicted upon these families. I continue to question the way this was conducted and have to question:

If the "fathers/men are the alleged perpetrators, why were they not taken from the ranch and the women and children (alleged victims) left in their homes?

Why was an investigation not held prior to taking the children?

Why were the women treated as they were guilty of child endangerment/mistreatment before there were grounds to implicate each and every woman?

Why were the women not allowed to keep their children at the shelters considering the alleged perpetrators were not present?

Isn't there more potential injury incurred on these children being yanked from their homes and families, over a potential allegation?

I have worked in Domestic Violence/Sexual Abuse programming for over 20 years and have never seen women and children treated this poorly, not to mention their civil rights being disregarded in this manner. It makes us all wonder how safe anyone is who has children.

Finally, one of the women asked me where I lived and told her Center Point. She asked me if I knew of any under age mothers in that community, I told her, "yes". She asked me if I knew of any domestic violence or sexual abuse that had been reported in my community and I replied, "yes". "Why then", she said, "Did no one hear of that community having all of the children taken from all of the mothers?" All I could respond was, "that is a very good question".