

2016 IL App (2d) 160317-U  
No. 2-16-0317  
Order filed September 21, 2016

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IN THE  
APPELLATE COURT OF ILLINOIS  
SECOND DISTRICT

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<i>In re</i> MALIA S., a Minor,	)	Appeal from the Circuit Court
	)	of Winnebago County.
	)	
	)	No. 2014-JA-51
	)	
(The People of the State of Illinois,	)	Honorable
Petitioner-Appellee, v. Catherine Brown,	)	Francis Martinez,
Respondent-Appellant).	)	Judge, Presiding.

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JUSTICE BURKE delivered the judgment of the court.  
Justices Hutchinson and Birkett concurred in the judgment.

**ORDER**

- ¶ 1 *Held:* The trial court's finding of parental unfitness and best interests determination to terminate parental rights were not against the manifest weight of the evidence.
- ¶ 2 Respondent, Catherine Brown, appeals from the trial court's order terminating her parental rights to her minor child, Malia S. The trial court found respondent unfit for failing to make (1) reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis of Malia's removal within two nine-month periods and (2) reasonable progress toward the return of Malia to her within the same two nine-month periods. See 750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(i), (D)(m)(ii) (West 2014). Respondent argues that the evidence does not support the court's finding of unfitness and the determination that termination of her rights is in Malia's best interests.

¶ 3 Malia became involved with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) because she was born with heroin in her system due to respondent's addiction. Soon after Malia was born, respondent relapsed, left treatment, and did not communicate with the caseworker or participate in the recommended services plans for seven months. Although respondent eventually showed some improvement in parenting and in her recovery, the trial court's finding that she failed to make reasonable progress toward the return of Malia within a nine-month period following the adjudication of neglect was not against the manifest weight of the evidence. It was also not against the manifest weight of the evidence for the court to find that termination of parental rights was in Malia's best interests. We affirm.

¶ 4 I. BACKGROUND

¶ 5 A. Adjudication and Disposition

¶ 6 Malia was born on October 7, 2013. On February 3, 2014, when Malia was four months old, the State filed a two-count petition for an adjudication of neglect. Count 1 alleged that Malia was born with heroin or a heroin metabolite in her urine, blood, or meconium, which was not a result of medical treatment. See 705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(c) (West 2014). Count 2 alleged that respondent placed Malia in an environment injurious to her welfare in that respondent had a substance abuse problem which prevented her from parenting properly and placing Malia at risk of harm. See 705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(b) (West 2014). At the time of the filing of the neglect petition, Malia was the subject of a safety plan that had been initiated upon her release from the hospital. Under the plan, Malia was residing with her maternal grandmother, who was the plan monitor, and any contact that Malia would have with respondent was to be supervised.

¶ 7 On April 17, 2014, respondent stipulated to count 1 of the neglect petition, and the trial court entered an adjudication of neglect. On May 28, 2014, the court placed guardianship and

custody of Malia with DCFS, with discretion to place Malia with either parent, another responsible relative, or in traditional foster care. In June 2014, DCFS placed Malia with her maternal aunt, Nicole.

¶ 8 B. Permanency Reviews

¶ 9 1. May 2014 to October 2014

¶ 10 The first permanency review was held on October 21, 2014. Molly Giese, the DCFS caseworker, testified that respondent was compliant with her services, including substance abuse treatment. Respondent had been referred to counseling and parenting classes but they had not yet begun. Respondent had visitation three to four times a week in Nicole's home. Reports of the visits were provided by Nicole and respondent. Giese testified, and the trial court found, that during the review period, respondent was making reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that led to Malia's removal.

¶ 11 2. October 2014 to January 2015

¶ 12 On January 20, 2015, Giese testified that respondent had not been in contact with the agency or the caseworker since November 2014. Before respondent lost contact, she had been referred to counseling and to parenting classes, which had not been completed. Respondent left her drug treatment program at Rosecrance. The trial court found that respondent had not made reasonable efforts or progress.

¶ 13 3. January 2015 to April 2015

¶ 14 On April 20, 2015, a report from DCFS indicated that respondent had minimal contact with the agency or Giese, was not engaged in services and was not visiting Malia as directed. The trial court again found that respondent had failed to make reasonable efforts or progress.

¶ 15 4. April 2015 to September 2015

¶ 16 On September 14, 2015, the trial court conducted a final permanency review. The court found that respondent had not made reasonable efforts or progress during the review period and changed the goal from return home to substitute care pending court determination on the termination of parental rights.

¶ 17 C. Termination of Parental Rights

¶ 18 On November 2, 2015, the State filed a four-count petition for termination of parental rights and the power to consent to adoption. Count 1 alleged that respondent failed to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to Malia's welfare. See 750 ILCS 50/1(b) (West 2014). Count 2 alleged that respondent had failed to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis of the removal of Malia from April 17, 2014, to January 17, 2015, and November 1, 2014, to August 1, 2015. See 750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(i) (West 2014). Count 3 alleged that respondent failed to make reasonable progress toward the return of Malia from April 17, 2014, to January 17, 2015, and November 1, 2014, to August 1, 2015. See 750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(ii) (West 2014). Count 4 alleged depravity based on what was believed to be a felony conviction, but the State withdrew the count upon discovering that respondent lacked the requisite criminal history. See 750 ILCs 50/1(j) (West 2014).

¶ 19 On December 10, 2015, the trial court held a hearing on respondent's unfitness, and the State presented evidence of respondent's efforts, progress, and interest during the permanency review periods. Giese testified that Malia was placed in foster care in June 2014 and she had served as the caseworker since July 2014. Giese described respondent's service plans as documents created for the family to itemize the services and tasks required for each person in the family, as well as reports on progress and outcomes.

¶ 20 Giese reported that respondent had been required to continue substance abuse treatment. From July through October 2014, respondent received inpatient treatment at Rosecrance and outpatient services at Greendale Recovery Home (Greendale). In September 2014, respondent's mother died, and respondent relapsed on Halloween 2014. From November 2014 to May 2015, Giese had little or no contact with respondent. Respondent resumed inpatient services in May or June 2015, and she was transferred a month later to Greendale for outpatient services, where she was currently receiving treatment.

¶ 21 Respondent also was required to complete individual counseling and, despite being referred in September 2014, she did not complete the counseling. Respondent maintained consistent contact until she relapsed. Giese confirmed that her contact information remained the same from October 2014 to May 2015 and that respondent had the information but did not contact her. Giese did not have contact information for respondent during that period. In May 2015, respondent was referred again to individual counseling, but because the goal was changed to substitute care, counseling did not begin.

¶ 22 Respondent was also required to complete parenting classes in 2014 but failed to complete them. After resuming contact with the agency in May 2015, respondent was referred again, and she was engaged in the classes at the time of the hearing. Respondent had attended all the classes and had almost completed the program.

¶ 23 Giese reported that respondent had been incarcerated twice during the case: in May 2015, before resuming inpatient drug treatment, and briefly in November 2015 for missing a drug test. Giese testified that, to her knowledge, respondent had not sent any cards, letters, gifts, food, clothing, or diapers to Malia. In 2014, respondent had weekly supervised visitation and DCFS was working toward unsupervised visitation, but from November 2014 to May 2015,

respondent lost contact with the agency and had no visits. Respondent resumed supervised visitation when she reentered treatment, but her work schedule made the visits sporadic.

¶ 24 Malia suffered from respiratory issues which required hospitalization, occupational therapy, and appointments with doctors and specialists. Respondent had been made aware of the appointments and therapy, but Giese believed that respondent did not participate in the treatment or visit Malia while she was hospitalized.

¶ 25 On cross-examination, Giese testified that, since resuming contact with the agency in May 2015, respondent was attending Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings and had a sponsor. Respondent had been completely drug-free and was subject to testing as part of the service plans and as a condition of her probation. Going forward, respondent would be required only to complete individual counseling and maintain her sobriety.

¶ 26 Upon questioning by the guardian *ad litem* (GAL), Giese testified that respondent had confirmed that she had relapsed from November 2014 to May 2015. At the time of the hearing, respondent was prescribed a number of psychotropic medications, which resulted in positive behavioral changes. Respondent was not as defensive and was more focused on her recovery and general health. Respondent confirmed to Giese that she had used heroin for several years before Malia was born with the drug in her system.

¶ 27 Respondent testified that, during the summer of 2014, she was in inpatient and then outpatient substance abuse treatment. Respondent's older sister, Nicole, was acting as the foster mother and would bring Malia to see respondent when she was in inpatient care. During outpatient care, respondent would get passes from the program to see Malia at least once a week and sometimes overnight.

¶ 28 Respondent admitted that her mother's death triggered her relapse. Respondent explained that her mother's death was traumatic, and she did not handle it properly. Respondent's mother supported her more than anyone else, and when she died, respondent felt there was no one left who cared about her that much. Respondent admitted that she used drugs and stayed away from Malia and the caseworker from November 2014 to May 2015. During that period, respondent became worried about her health and entered rehab and detoxification treatment. Respondent told her probation officer that she was in rehab, but she did not turn herself into the police as directed.

¶ 29 Respondent testified that, at the time of the hearing, she had been sober for seven months and in outpatient treatment since completing her inpatient care. Respondent was attending NA and AA meetings four to five times a week. She was attending different kinds of meetings to build her support network. She found a new sponsor who had more time to devote to their relationship, and she saw the sponsor at least twice a week.

¶ 30 At the time of the hearing, respondent lived at Greendale and had a counselor and case manager there. She attended parenting and substance abuse classes. Greendale permits family members to live together and offers family housing, in case she began residing with Malia again. Respondent intended to continue residing at Greendale.

¶ 31 Respondent testified that she has tools to avoid relapsing, including her meetings at Greendale, her sponsors, her officer from Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC), and her probation officer. Respondent stated that she was working harder and had been sober longer than at any other time in the last 16 years. Respondent had learned to let go of negative relationships and friendships from her past.

¶ 32 Respondent testified that her current visitation schedule was hindered by her work schedule. She bought Malia clothes and other items, but her sister said Malia needed “nothing.” Respondent did not visit Malia in the hospital because she was incarcerated or in rehab.

¶ 33 Respondent acknowledged her criminal record and explained that she committed the offenses in furtherance of her drug addiction. Respondent, who was 29 years old at the time of the hearing, admitted using heroin since she was 19 years old. She admitted going through outpatient treatment more than twice.

¶ 34 Respondent testified that she was very committed to remaining sober and recognized that this was probably her last chance to do so. Respondent wanted to return to school and be a mother to Malia. When asked how she would avoid relapsing if faced with another traumatic situation, respondent testified that she would do everything she had failed to do last time. She would talk to people, communicate her feelings, and not isolate herself from her support group.

¶ 35 On January 13, 2016, the trial court entered written findings of unfitness on counts 2 and 3. The trial court observed that respondent began her services, complied with the plans and then went “off the radar” for an extended period; but unlike in a typical case, she returned for treatment and services and resumed her compliance with the service plans. The court found respondent to be credible, sincere, and presently in control of her addictions. Noting that respondent’s compliance before and after her relapse was substantial, the court nevertheless found that the intervening action of the death of respondent’s mother caused respondent to not participate in the service plans from November 2014 to May 2015. The court found respondent unfit under counts 2 and 3 for failing to make reasonable efforts or progress from April 17, 2014, to January 17, 2015, and from November 1, 2014, to August 1, 2015. See 750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(i), (m)(ii) (West 2014).



¶ 36 The cause proceeded to a best interests hearing. The court heard testimony from Giese, Nicole, respondent's addiction counselor, and respondent. At the time of the best-interests hearing on February 18, 2016, Malia was 28 months old and had been residing with her maternal aunt, Nicole, since June 2014, when she was 8 months old. Giese testified that Malia lives with Nicole, who is willing to adopt her. Nicole has two daughters, who are older than Malia and live part-time with their father. Giese reported that she had no concerns about Nicole's home, which is clean and "homey." Malia is comfortable in the home, has her own room, and moves about freely. Nicole and Malia are active in the community, and they go to the park, the store, and family get-togethers.

¶ 37 Giese testified that Malia is bonded with Nicole and looks to her for her daily care, her emotional needs, food, and anything else a two year old would need. Nicole also tends to Malia's respiratory problems, which were under control. Nicole and Malia maintain a relationship with their extended family, including Malia's older brother who is placed with his biological father. The siblings visit at least twice a month, and Nicole was willing to facilitate contact between the siblings and parents if appropriate. Giese testified that Malia currently was visiting respondent at the agency, which picks up Malia from daycare for the visits. Nicole was willing to facilitate continued visitation with respondent after adoption. Nicole and respondent have a positive relationship, but their work schedules made scheduling visitation themselves somewhat complicated.

¶ 38 When asked whether having "two moms" would be disruptive or confusing, Giese testified that Malia calls both respondent and Nicole "mom" but looks to Nicole to meet her needs. Giese opined that removing Malia from the foster home would be disruptive. Besides

respondent and Nicole, no one had come forward to care for Malia. Giese opined that Malia was in a stable environment and that it was in her best interests to remain in Nicole's home.

¶ 39 Nicole testified that she provided daily care and medications for Malia and took her to all her doctor's appointments. Nicole and respondent tried to coordinate their schedules for visitation but could only arrange one visit per week. Nicole believed that respondent was not fabricating her reasons for not being more available. Nicole had hoped that respondent would take the lead, but DCFS eventually stepped in to coordinate the visits. Respondent did not visit Malia at all from November 2014 to May 2015.

¶ 40 Nicole confirmed that she was bonded with Malia and that they play outside during the summer, play in the snow in winter, and go to a park which is just a couple blocks from her house. Nicole and Malia spend time with friends and other children. There is a bit of confusion in that Malia calls both Nicole and respondent "mom," but Malia seeks out Nicole when she needs something. Malia is excited to see either Nicole or respondent, but Nicole felt that she and Malia shared a deeper, more emotional relationship. Nicole conceded that respondent had purchased a coat and several other items for Malia and had told Nicole to ask for anything else Malia needed, but Nicole believed that respondent should not need to be asked for support. Nicole also believed that respondent should not need to be asked or pushed to attend Malia's doctor's appointments.

¶ 41 Kelly, respondent's addiction counselor, testified that she had worked with respondent since July 2015 and was meeting with her regularly. Respondent's drug tests had been negative, and she had shown tremendous growth since they began working together. Respondent had developed a sober support network, engaged in community support and a 12-step program,

sought out multiple sponsors, and was living in a recovery home for additional structure. Kelly opined that respondent's risk of relapse was relatively low.

¶ 42 Respondent testified to her visitation with Malia and how her work schedule made the visits difficult. The visits ended for a time until the caseworker started arranging them. When respondent arrives, Malia jumps into her arms and calls her "mommy." During visits, she and Malia color, read books, eat snacks, and take photographs with respondent's mobile phone. Malia is very affectionate, likes to be held, gives kisses, and tells respondent "I love you." Sometimes, Malia wants to leave with respondent at the end of visits.

¶ 43 Respondent testified that she has provided birthday and Christmas gifts, toys, shoes, and clothing, although sometimes the sizes are too small. Respondent offered to purchase food or other clothing, but Nicole said she did not need anything.

¶ 44 Respondent testified that she was working part-time at a fast food restaurant and residing at Greendale in a two-bedroom apartment with three roommates. Respondent said she wants to move into an available family unit with Malia, and reside there for the foreseeable future. Respondent testified that Greendale did not limit the duration of residency. Greendale was offering structure and support, with a counselor and other staff. Outside of Greendale, respondent was attending NA and AA meetings regularly. If she regained custody of Malia, respondent would leave her in daycare so respondent could continue her counseling and meetings. Malia would continue seeing her maternal grandmother and Nicole.

¶ 45 Respondent was aware of Malia's breathing problems and described her current treatment. Respondent testified that she could take Malia to her doctor's appointments and provide medication at home.

¶ 46 Respondent was involved with drug court because of a retail theft. Since July 2015, she had been administered Vivitrol, which is an opiate blocker that curbs cravings. Respondent stated that it was her decision as to how long she would take the medication.

¶ 47 Respondent denied being resentful of Nicole. Respondent admitted that, after she relapsed, she wrongly told the caseworker that Nicole was the reason Malia was taken away. Respondent conceded that there was nothing wrong with Nicole's care of Malia and stated she was very grateful for Nicole's help.

¶ 48 The trial court acknowledged that respondent had made great strides in regaining her sobriety and observed that respondent and Nicole had essentially traded roles, with Nicole as the parental figure and respondent as the good and loving aunt. Noting that time had "marched on" such that Malia had become increasingly integrated into Nicole's home, the court found that it was in Malia's best interests to terminate respondent's parental rights. The court entered a judgment terminating respondent's parental rights, and this timely appeal followed.

¶ 49

## II. ANALYSIS

¶ 50 Respondent appeals from the termination of her parental rights. A parent's right to raise his or her biological child is a fundamental liberty interest, and the involuntary termination of that right is a drastic measure. *In re Haley D.*, 2011 IL 110886, ¶ 90. Accordingly, the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 (Juvenile Court Act) provides a two-stage process for the involuntary termination of parental rights. 705 ILCS 405/2-29(2) (West 2014). Initially, the petitioner must prove by clear and convincing evidence that the parent is unfit. 705 ILCS 405/2-29(2), (4) (West 2014); 750 ILCS 50/1(D) (West 2014); *In re Adoption of Syck*, 138 Ill. 2d 255, 277 (1990); *In re Antwan L.*, 368 Ill. App. 3d 1119, 1123 (2006). We will reverse the trial court's finding of unfitness only if it was against the manifest weight of the evidence. A determination of unfitness

is against the manifest weight of the evidence only if the opposite conclusion is clearly evident or the determination is unreasonable, arbitrary, or not based on the evidence presented. *In re Addison R.*, 2013 IL App (2d) 121318, ¶ 22.

¶ 51 If the court finds the parent unfit, the petitioner must then show that termination of parental rights would serve the child's best interests. 705 ILCS 405/2-29(2) (West 2014); *Syck*, 138 Ill. 2d at 277; *Antwan L.*, 368 Ill. App. 3d at 1123. As our supreme court has noted, at the best-interests phase, "the parent's interest in maintaining the parent-child relationship must yield to the child's interest in a stable, loving home life." *In re D.T.*, 212 Ill. 2d 347, 364 (2004). Section 1-3(4.05) of the Adoption Act (705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05) (West 2014)) sets forth various factors for the trial court to consider in assessing a child's best interests. The petitioner bears the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence that termination is in the best interests of the minor. *D.T.*, 212 Ill. 2d at 366; *In re Deandre D.*, 405 Ill. App. 3d 945, 953 (2010). A trial court's best-interests finding will not be disturbed on appeal unless it is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *Deandre D.*, 405 Ill. App. 3d at 953.

¶ 52 A. Unfitness

¶ 53 Section 1(D) of the Adoption Act sets forth numerous grounds under which a parent may be found unfit, but any one of the grounds, if properly proven, is sufficient to enter a finding of unfitness. *In re Joshua S.*, 2012 IL App (2d) 120197, ¶ 44. The trial court is generally in the best position to assess the credibility of the witnesses and, therefore, we will not reweigh or reassess credibility on appeal. As cases concerning parental unfitness are *sui generis*, unique unto themselves, courts generally do not make factual comparisons to other cases. *Joshua S.*, 2012 IL App (2d) 120197, ¶ 44.

¶ 54 The Adoption Act specifies the following among the grounds for a finding of parental unfitness:

“(m) Failure by a parent (i) to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for the removal of the child from the parent during any 9-month period following the adjudication of neglected or abused minor \*\*\* or (ii) to make reasonable progress toward the return of the child to the parent during any 9-month period following the adjudication of neglected or abused minor.” 750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m) (West 2014).

¶ 55 The trial court found that respondent had failed to make reasonable efforts or reasonable progress over two nine-month periods, but we need review only one basis to dispose of the appeal. We elect to review the finding that respondent failed to make reasonable progress from November 1, 2014, to August 1, 2015, because it supports the finding of unfitness. See *Joshua S.*, 2012 IL App (2d) 120197, ¶ 44. During that period, respondent spent seven months on heroin, avoiding contact with Malia, the foster home, and the caseworker, and not complying with any part of the service plans. The permanency reviews on January 20, 2015, April 20, 2015, and September 14, 2015, cover the relevant period.

¶ 56 Under an objective standard, reasonable progress requires, at a minimum, the parent make measurable steps toward the goal of reunification through compliance with court directives, service plans or both. *In re J.A.*, 316 Ill. App. 3d 553, 564-65 (2000). The trial court must consider evidence occurring only during the relevant nine-month period mandated in section 1(D)(m) in determining whether a parent has made reasonable progress toward the return of the children. *In re J.L.*, 236 Ill. 2d 329, 341 (2010).

¶ 57 Respondent emphasizes her compliance with the service plans before and after her relapse and the court finding her to be sincere and dedicated to maintaining her sobriety. Although the evidence shows that she was making progress before her relapse at the start of the relevant nine-month period, the court heard ample evidence regarding her noncompliance with the service plans during the relevant nine-month period.

¶ 58 DCFS became involved with Malia after she was born with heroin in her system, which was the basis for removing her from the home. At birth, Malia suffered from active withdrawal symptoms and was hospitalized for a month. Malia was administered and then weaned from methadone. At the time of the unfitness hearing, Malia was suffering from ongoing respiratory problems, and respondent had not participated in her doctor's visits or occupational therapy.

¶ 59 DCFS directed respondent to submit to ongoing substance abuse treatment. After completing inpatient treatment at Rosecrance, respondent moved into Greendale for outpatient services. Respondent relapsed on Halloween 2014 following the death of her mother, which was admittedly traumatic. Respondent also was required to complete individual counseling and, despite being referred in September 2014, she did not complete the counseling. From November 2014 to May 2015, respondent had little or no contact with Malia, the foster home, or Giese, although respondent knew how to contact them. Giese testified that, to her knowledge, respondent had not sent any cards, letters, gifts, food, clothing, or diapers to Malia.

¶ 60 In May or June 2015, respondent was arrested, resumed inpatient services, and was transferred a month later to Greendale for outpatient services. Respondent was referred again to individual counseling, but because the goal was changed to substitute care, counseling did not begin. After resuming contact with the agency, respondent was referred for parenting classes, and she was engaged in the classes for a few weeks at the end of the relevant nine-month period.

¶ 61 Under an objective standard, respondent did not make measurable steps toward the goal of reunification through compliance with the court directives or the service plans. Like the trial court, we sympathize with respondent for the death of her mother and her continuing struggle with heroin addiction. However, respondent's relapse and seven months spent "off the radar" demonstrates that she failed to make reasonable progress toward the return of Malia from November 1, 2014, to August 1, 2015. Respondent cannot reasonably argue that the finding of unfitness for failure to make reasonable progress toward reunification during the relevant period is against the manifest weight of the evidence. Respondent's prolonged relapse rendered her no closer to the return home of Malia at the end of the nine-month period than she was at the beginning.

¶ 62 **B. Best Interests**

¶ 63 Once the trial court finds a parent unfit, it must determine whether termination of parental rights is in the minor's best interests. Respondent cannot establish that the trial court's best-interests finding is against the manifest weight of the evidence. A review of the factors set forth in section 1-3(4.05) of the Adoption Act (705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05) (West 2014)) supports the court's determination that an adoption would be the best option for providing Malia stability and permanency.

¶ 64 Malia had been residing in the same foster home for more than two-thirds her life, considering her young age. The evidence shows that Nicole cares for all of Malia's needs by providing a nurturing environment, stability, adequate food, medical care, and emotional support. 705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05)(a) (West 2014). Malia's close relationship and positive interaction with her aunt supports a finding that her current placement will allow her to develop her identity. 705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05)(b) (West 2014)). Malia understands that respondent is her mother, but she



also calls Nicole “mom” and behaves as though she is her parent. 705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05)(c) (West 2014).

¶ 65 Malia has bonded with her aunt, and the court heard testimony that they are very loving and affectionate with each other. The caseworker opined that removing Malia from the foster home would be disruptive. 705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05)(d) (West 2014). Nicole integrated Malia into her home while fostering relationships with the extended family. 705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05)(f) (West 2014)). Malia’s need for stability and continuity of relationships is reflected in her demonstrated progress in the loving and stable home of Nicole, with whom she has developed a strong bond. 705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05)(g) (West 2014). Malia is doing well in her current placement, and Nicole expressed a strong commitment to providing the best for her, including permanency through adoption. Nicole testified to the reciprocal attachment, which shows that it is in the best interests of Malia to remain with her. 705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05)(j) (West 2014).

¶ 66 The trial court acknowledged that Malia has a positive relationship with respondent and that respondent had made substantial progress in her recovery and tremendous gains in her life. Respondent had secured employment and a support network and was pursuing treatment in a residential facility. Recognizing her sister’s progress, Nicole testified that she would facilitate a continuing relationship between Malia and respondent, although she would have no obligation to do so. We agree with the trial court that respondent should be proud of all she has achieved. However, we further agree with the court that termination is in Malia’s best interests because stability in the child’s life is paramount and the passage of time has caused her to be increasingly integrated in Nicole’s home.

¶ 67 Given the foregoing evidence, we cannot say that a conclusion opposite to the one reached by the trial court is clearly apparent. Respondent cannot establish in this appeal that the court's best-interests determination is against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 68 **III. CONCLUSION**

¶ 69 We conclude that neither the finding of unfitness nor the best-interests determination is against the manifest weight of the evidence. We therefore affirm the judgment of the circuit court of Winnebago County terminating respondent's parental rights.

¶ 70 Affirmed.