2018 IL App (2d) 180029-U
No. 2-18-0029
Order filed April 18, 2018

IN THE

APPELLATE COURT OF ILLINOIS

SECOND DISTRICT

In re JEREMIAH H. and JAYLEN H., Minors	)	Appeal from the Circuit Court
	)	of Winnebago County.
	)	
	)	Nos. 14-JA-58
	)	14-JA 59
	)	
(The People of the State of Illinois, Petitioner-Appellee, v. Tamika B., Respondent-Appellant).	)	Honorable
	)	Francis M. Martinez,
	)	Judge, Presiding.

JUSTICE SPENCE delivered the judgment of the court.
Justices McLaren and Hutchinson concurred in the judgment.

ORDER

¶ 1 *Held*: It was not against the manifest weight of the evidence for the trial court to conclude that respondent was unfit as to her sons and that it was in the boys' best interests to terminate her parental rights. Therefore, we affirmed.

¶ 2 Respondent, Tamika B., appeals from the trial court's rulings terminating her parental rights to her sons, Jeremiah H. and Jaylen H. Respondent argues that the trial court's findings, that she (1) failed to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the children's welfare (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2016)); (2) failed to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for their removal during a nine-month period after the adjudications of neglect (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(i) (West 2016)); and (3) failed to make

reasonable progress towards their return during the same nine-month period (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(ii) (West 2016)), were against the manifest weight of the evidence. She also argues that the trial court erred in finding that it was in the children's best interests to terminate her parental rights. We affirm.

¶ 3 I. BACKGROUND

¶ 4 Jeremiah was born on June 5, 2010, and Jaylen was born on April 11, 2013. A Department of Children and Family Service (DCFS) statement of facts filed on February 6, 2014, stated that two days prior, the minors' 10-year-old sibling[1] called the police stating that the minors' father, Lawrence H., was hitting respondent. Both parents had scratches and swelling on their heads. It was reported to DCFS that respondent was standing in the road holding Jaylen, who was wearing only a t-shirt and very soiled diaper even though it was very cold outside. Three other children were inside, and there was no food in the house other than dry oatmeal. When respondent was asked her name, she talked about demons and heaven.

¶ 5 The trial court held a shelter care hearing, and it found that there was probable cause to believe that the boys were neglected. It granted temporary guardianship and custody of the boys to DCFS.

¶ 6 Also on February 6, 2014, the State filed neglect petitions. Count 1 alleged that the children were neglected because their environment was injurious to their welfare, in that their parents engaged in domestic violence in front of them. See 705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(b) (West 2012). Count 2 alleged that the children were neglected because they were not receiving the

[1] The boys have two siblings who were also the subject of many of the same proceedings. However, the siblings are not involved in this appeal, so we reference them only when necessary for context.

proper or necessary support, education, or medical care, or not receiving other care including food, clothing, and shelter. See 705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(a) (West 2012).

¶ 7 A DCFS report to the court filed on March 25, 2014, stated that respondent had a history of bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. After the incident the prior month, she was transported to a hospital to be psychiatrically assessed, and she was hospitalized from February 5, 2014, to February 13, 2014. Respondent was not employed but received disability income. She completed a drug test on February 24, 2014, that was positive for marijuana. DCFS recommended that respondent participate in individual psychotherapy, a domestic violence assessment and counseling, parenting education, and family therapy. DCFS confirmed that respondent was attending counseling at Rosecrance and met with a psychiatrist there for medication.

¶ 8 A DCFS report to the court filed on April 23, 2014, stated that respondent's drug test of March 17, 2014, was positive for marijuana. She had been engaging in 3-hour weekly visitation with the children.

¶ 9 A DCFS report to the court filed on May 20, 2014, stated that in a mental health assessment, respondent reported daily marijuana use since the age of 13. She had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, as well as alcohol and cannabis dependence. Respondent reported engaging in services for her mental health and taking medication.

¶ 10 A DCFS report to the court filed on August 5, 2014, stated that respondent continued to live in Rockford but had plans to move to Milwaukee, despite the agency's warning that it might be more difficult for her to complete services and have her children returned home if she was living in another state. Respondent continued to visit the children and acted appropriately with them, and she showed verbal and physical affection.

¶ 11 On August 27, 2014, the trial court adjudicated the children neglected pursuant to respondent's stipulation to count 1, as well as by the court's finding that the State proved this count by a preponderance of the evidence. Based on respondent's stipulation to count 1, the State agreed to dismiss count 2.

¶ 12 A DCFS report to the court filed on October 23, 2014, stated that respondent moved to Milwaukee on August 28, 2014. As of August 13, 2014, she had successfully completed her parenting classes. She was also engaged in domestic violence classes. She still needed to identify a new clinician who would help her with her mental health needs. Respondent continued to consistently visit the children and appropriately engage them.

¶ 13 On November 20, 2014, the trial court entered an order of disposition finding that respondent was unfit or unwilling to parent the children, and that it was in their best interests to be made wards of the court. It gave custody and guardianship of the boys to DCFS.

¶ 14 Respondent appealed from the order, which also pertained to two of her other children, and appellate counsel was appointed to represent her. Pursuant to *Anders*, counsel moved to withdraw, and we granted the motion in an order entered on May 18, 2015. *In re Jaylen H., Jeremiah H., Tanasia B., & Jateis L.*, 2015 IL App (2d) 141256-U.

¶ 15 As relevant here, we stated that the record clearly supported the adjudication of neglect because respondent stipulated to count 1. *Id.* ¶ 37. Additionally, a police officer testified that he responded to a 911 call by one of respondent's children that Lawrence was hitting and choking her; respondent was at her home with blood coming from her ear and scratch marks on her neck; and Lawrence was arrested for domestic violence. *Id.* ¶¶ 35, 37. Respondent had also stated that Lawrence would abuse her in front of her children, and she sought domestic violence counseling. *Id.* ¶ 37. We further found that it was not against the manifest weight of the evidence for the trial

court to find respondent unfit and that it was in the children's best interests to be removed from her custody, based on her mental health and substance abuse issues. *Id.* ¶¶ 39, 41.

¶ 16 A DCFS report to the court filed on January 12, 2015, stated that respondent was attending a domestic violence program. She was attending mental health treatment, and her service providers reported that she was doing well and making progress. Respondent continued to attend the majority of her visitation.

¶ 17 At a permanency review hearing on February 23, 2015, the trial court found that respondent had made reasonable efforts.

¶ 18 A DCFS report to the court filed on May 8, 2015, stated that respondent had completed a 24-week domestic violence program and was compliant with her mental health treatment. She had visitation with the children twice per month for six hours, with two of those hours being unsupervised.

¶ 19 At permanency hearings on June 11, 2015, and October 19, 2015, the trial court found that respondent had made reasonable efforts and progress. It was reported at the latter hearing that respondent was having overnight visitation with the children. The trial court set the goal at return home within five months.

¶ 20 A DCFS report to the court filed on November 30, 2015, stated that respondent had reported that Lawrence had come into her home on November 7, 2015, and hit her in the stomach. Respondent was five months pregnant at the time. A Milwaukee social worker reported that during a home study, respondent repeatedly expressed that she would allow Lawrence back into the home because she did not believe in divorce and thought his prior abuse was due only to drugs. Respondent reported to DCFS on November 12, 2015, that there was nothing she could do to keep Lawrence from entering the home and harming her. She did obtain

an order of no contact against him. DCFS was concerned about respondent's ability to protect herself and her children. It changed her visitation to supervised visitation, and it recommended additional domestic violence classes to assist her in creating and implementing a family safety plan.

¶ 21 A DCFS report to the court filed on April 27, 2016, stated that respondent had participated in additional domestic violence sessions. She had obtained an order of protection against Lawrence. She was semi-complaint in her mental health treatment, having missed appointments. DCFS had recommended that respondent participate in family therapy sessions, but she was not demonstrating a commitment to weekly or biweekly sessions. She reported that she was due to give birth on May 4, 2016. Respondent reported struggling to attend appointments due to her high-risk pregnancy.

¶ 22 At a permanency review hearing on April 27, 2016, respondent indicated that she planned to move to Texas because she had family living there. The trial court found that respondent had made reasonable efforts but not reasonable progress, stating that the case was "somewhat chaotic and directionless." It changed the permanency goal to return home within 12 months.

¶ 23 A DCFS report to the court filed on September 29, 2016, stated that respondent had been minimally cooperating with DCFS. She was evicted from her Milwaukee residence and reported moving back to Rockford at the end of July 2016. Respondent did not participate in any mental health or individual therapy sessions from February 8, 2016, to June 13, 2016. She self-reported being cured of her mental illness and not needing medication. She completed a psychiatric evaluation on June 10, 2016, but DCFS was unable to get copies of the records and treatment plans from the providers. Respondent had participated with four different providers for mental health and counseling services in the previous two years, and the changes in providers had made

assessment of her needs difficult. DCFS had recommended that respondent complete an updated mental health assessment with Rosecrance, but she had not done so. She had begun individual therapy on August 1, 2016, and service providers noted concerns, such as respondent no longer taking psychotropic medication and not understanding how her mental health symptoms impacted her ability to care for the children. They were concerned that if she did not educate herself about her mental health, learn to identify symptoms, and use mental health services, she might disrupt her level of functioning and place herself and her children at risk.

¶ 24 The report further stated that respondent was not demonstrating a commitment to participate in family therapy. She gave birth to a baby on May 2, 2016, in Milwaukee. Respondent reported completing paperwork giving custody and guardianship of the baby to her sister in Texas. However, DCFS had contacted authorities in Texas, who stated that, according to the sister, the baby was no longer in her care. Respondent did not participate in visitation with her children from April 20, 2016, to June 29, 2016. She stated that she could not visit them due to the birth of her child, but she did not provide any documentation of her medical condition.

¶ 25 A permanency hearing took place on November 1, 2016, at which the trial court found as follows. The children had been in care for over two years. Respondent had moved between Rockford and Milwaukee during that time, which interrupted services. Respondent was receiving social security disability payments, and the trial court did not believe that her mental health issues had been resolved. It found that she had not made reasonable efforts or progress. It changed the goal to substitute care pending court determination of termination of parental rights.

¶ 26 The State filed a petition to terminate parental rights on November 9, 2016. It alleged that respondent was unfit in that she had: (1) failed to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the children's welfare (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2016)); (2)

failed to protect the minors from conditions within the environment injurious to their welfare (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(g) (West 2016)); (3) failed to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for the children's removal during a nine-month period after the adjudication of abuse or neglect, namely from February 1, 2016, to November 1, 2016 (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(i) (West 2016)); and (4) failed to make reasonable progress toward the return of the children during the same nine-month period (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(ii) (West 2016)).

¶ 27 A DCFS report to the court filed on November 28, 2016, stated that respondent had not reported re-engaging with local service providers for mental health and domestic violence services. DCFS received information that respondent remained in a relationship with Lawrence despite having an order of protection in place, and that they were the primary caregivers to respondent's baby. Rockford police had conducted a welfare check at respondent's address, but no one answered the door. Neighbors reported that she lived at the home with an infant and a man fitting Lawrence's description. Respondent was having two hours of supervised visitation per month with her children.

¶ 28 A DCFS report to the court filed on January 3, 2017, stated that Lawrence was arrested during a traffic stop on November 8, 2016, for violating an order of protection. Respondent and her baby were in the vehicle.

¶ 29 A hearing on the petition to terminate parental rights took place on October 18, 2017. Caseworker Angela Jones testified as follows. She had been a caseworker for Jeremiah, who was seven, and Jaylen, who was four, since September 2014. After conducting an integrated assessment, DCFS had recommended that respondent participate in parenting, individual and family counseling, mental health, domestic violence, and substance abuse services. She successfully completed parenting services in 2014. She completed substance abuse services in

2015, and there had been no positive drug tests since then. However, she was not discharged from any other services because she would make some progress and then regress. She had completed domestic violence services but was required to re-engage in such services after the domestic violence incident against her. Jones agreed that family counseling was not taking place with Jaylen and Jeremiah because it was not yet appropriate for those children. Also, throughout the majority of the case, respondent had maintained contact with DCFS.

¶ 30 Respondent moved to Milwaukee in August 2014, moved back to Rockford in August 2016, and again moved to Milwaukee in March 2017. Jones had several conversations with respondent about how moving to Milwaukee would make services and visitation more difficult. During visitation, respondent would provide food for the children, and sometimes she would bring activities and small gifts. There were some extended periods of time in which respondent did not visit the children. She visited the children in February 2016 but did not see them again until June 2016. Respondent said that she had been directed by her maternity doctor not to travel, but respondent did not provide DCFS with requested documentation. Also, she saw the children on December 31, 2016; did not see them again until March 13, 2017; and then did not visit again until June 2017. She did not provide any explanation for these gaps. Respondent had 24-hour unsupervised visitation with the minors in the fall of 2015 at a local hotel. However, that was stopped after the domestic violence incident with Lawrence in October 2015, which created a substantial risk of harm to the minors. Also, at that time, respondent had been dishonest with DCFS regarding her relationship with Lawrence, and DCFS was never able to return unsupervised visitation.

¶ 31 Respondent and Lawrence had a history of domestic violence dating back to 2012. She obtained an order of protection against him, but she also continued a relationship with him, and

Lawrence was the father of her baby. She denied being in the car when Lawrence was arrested in November 2016, despite what was stated in the police report and the fact that Lawrence was arrested for violating the order of protection based on her presence.

¶ 32 In 2016 and 2017 respondent reported that she was cured of her mental illnesses, even though the most recent reports from practitioners stated that respondent continued to require mental health treatment. From DCFS's perspective, respondent still needed to complete domestic violence services, show continuous engagement in individual counseling and medication management, and engage in family therapy when it was deemed appropriate.

¶ 33 On November 6, 2017, the trial court found that the State had proven counts 1, 3, and 4. It stated that during the relevant period, respondent relocated to Milwaukee, which made visitation problematic, and there was a substantial gap of time in which respondent did not visit the children. Respondent also did not make sufficient efforts or progress to complete the services that were necessary to cure the conditions that led to the children's removal. The children were no closer to being placed with respondent than they were when they came into care.

¶ 34 The best interest hearing took place on January 3, 2018. Jones provided the following testimony. Jeremiah and Jaylen had been in their current foster home placement since November 7, 2015, after three prior placements where the caregivers had asked for them to be removed. Their half-sister also lived in their current home. The boys had a close relationship and strong bond with the foster parents, to whom they looked for support and care. They further had a good relationship with the foster parents' extended family, some of whom lived in the home. The home was safe and appropriate. The family attended the YMCA on a regular basis, and Jeremiah attended a camp in Wisconsin in the summer. Jeremiah had been diagnosed with ADHD, for

which he received medication, and both minors participated in counseling. Jeremiah was hospitalized in November 2017 due to extreme behaviors at school, and the foster parents assisted him and made sure that he attended follow-up appointments. Jeremiah had a history of defiant behaviors, and his overall behavior had improved after living with his current foster parents. The foster parents were willing to adopt the children.

¶ 35 Jones further testified that the boys had a good relationship with respondent. They enjoyed visitation, and respondent and the boys were affectionate towards each other. She brought food for them and small gifts. The boys had three siblings who did not live in the home, and they had some contact with one of them. Another sibling was an adult, and the remaining sibling was respondent's baby. Jones opined that it was in the minors' best interests to terminate parental rights.

¶ 36 Respondent testified as follows. She had a very close relationship with Jeremiah and Jaylen. When she arrived at visitation, they would run to her, hug her, and tell her that they missed her. They also talked about two of their older siblings who they no longer lived with. During the visits with respondent, they would play board games and play with puppets, and she would read to them. They also engaged in activities like decorating gingerbread men. When respondent had overnight visitation with them, she would take care of them, feed them, and bathe them. At the end of visits, the children would cry and ask why they could not go with her.

¶ 37 The boys had a close relationship with respondent's sister, their cousins, and their half-siblings. Respondent believed that they were acting out because of being in an "unfamiliar place." She denied engaging in domestic violence in front of the children. Respondent believed that it was in their best interests that she continue working towards having them returned.

¶ 38 In rebuttal, Jones testified that she attended most of the visits and received case notes on the visits that she did not attend. She had never observed the minors ask respondent when they could come home. There were "some behaviors" at the end of visits, but it appeared to be related to not wanting to stop the activity rather than not wanting to leave respondent. Jones had never observed them ask about their siblings.

¶ 39 The trial court stated that the children had been in care for a significant period of time. They were thriving with their current foster parents. The foster parents took care of them and had a strong bond with them, and the children looked to the foster parents as their family. The children were also happy to see respondent and knew that she was their mother, but one of the reasons that the visits went so well was because the children knew they were going back to a safe environment. The trial court found that it was in the children's best interests to terminate respondent's parental rights.

¶ 40 Respondent timely appealed.

¶ 41 II. ANALYSIS

¶ 42 On appeal, respondent argues that it was against the manifest weight of the evidence for the trial court to find that she was unfit on three counts, and to find that it was in the children's best interests to terminate her rights.

¶ 43 The termination of parental rights is a two-step process governed by the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 (Juvenile Court Act) (705 ILCS 405/1-1 *et seq.* (West 2016)) and the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/1 *et seq.* (West 2016)). *In re J.L.*, 236 Ill. 2d 329, 337 (2010). The State must first establish by clear and convincing evidence that the parent is unfit under section 1(D) of the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/1(D) (West 2016)). *In re M.I.*, 2016 IL 120232, ¶ 20. If the trial court determines that the parent is unfit, the trial court's focus shifts from the parent's fitness to

the child's best interest in the second stage of the process, the best interest hearing. *In re B.B.*, 386 Ill. App. 3d 686, 697-98 (2008).

¶ 44 A court may find a parent unfit as long as one of the statutory grounds of unfitness is proven by clear and convincing evidence. *In re P.M.C.*, 387 Ill. App. 3d 1145, 1149 (2009). We will not reverse a trial court's finding of unfitness unless it is against the manifest weight of the evidence, because the trial court has a superior opportunity to view and evaluate the parties. *In re M.I.*, 2016 IL 120232, ¶ 20. A decision is against the manifest weight of the evidence only if the opposite conclusion is clearly apparent. *Id.*

¶ 45 We begin with the trial court's determination on count 4, that respondent failed to make reasonable progress during the nine-month period of February 1, 2016, to November 1, 2016. One statutory ground of unfitness is a parent's failure to make reasonable progress towards the child's return during any nine-month period after the initial nine-month period following the adjudication of neglect. 750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(ii) (West 2016). Our supreme court has defined reasonable progress as " 'demonstrable movement toward the goal of reunification.' " *In re C.N.*, 196 Ill. 2d 181, 211 (2001) (quoting *In re J.A.*, 316 Ill. App. 3d 553, 565 (2000)). Progress towards the child's return is measured by the parent's compliance with the service plans and the court's directives, in light of both the conditions which caused the child's removal and conditions that became known later and which would prevent the court from returning custody of the child to the parent. *Id.* at 216-17. We review reasonable progress using an objective standard, and reasonable progress can be found if the trial court can conclude that it can return the child to the parent in the near future. *In re A.S.*, 2014 IL App (3d) 140060, ¶ 17.

¶ 46 Respondent argues as follows. She was found to have made reasonable progress on numerous occasions prior to the period of time alleged by the State, and there was very little left

for her to do. During the relevant period, she moved to Rockford, which was closer to the children. She attended multiple therapy sessions, completed a psychiatric evaluation, and was engaging in individual therapy. She was rated satisfactory in three of the six categories. Respondent argues that given the fact that she also had a child during this time, she certainly showed reasonable progress.

¶ 47 We note that at the outset of the case, DCFS had recommended that respondent participate in parenting, individual and family counseling, mental health, domestic violence, and substance abuse services. Respondent had successfully completed parenting and substance abuse services before the time period at issue. She was also progressing in other areas, to the extent that she was engaging in unsupervised, overnight visitation with the children. The August 18, 2016, service plan, which covered the prior six months and was admitted into evidence at the fitness hearing, further rated respondent satisfactory in the area of domestic violence, noting that she had self-enrolled in classes. However, the service plan rated respondent unsatisfactory in other key areas, including individual therapy and visitation.

¶ 48 Part of respondent's difficulties with services appears to stem from the fact that she kept moving between Rockford and Milwaukee, despite DCFS's warnings that living in Milwaukee would make engaging in services more difficult. Although respondent highlights moving back to Rockford during the relevant time, she did not return to Rockford until August 2016, after having first chosen to move to Milwaukee in August 2014. Respondent's mental health was a significant concern at the time the children came into care. While she completed a psychiatric evaluation on June 10, 2016, the service plan also stated that she did not participate in any mental health or individual therapy sessions from February 8, 2016, to July 12, 2016. Further,

although her service providers reported that respondent needed continuing mental health treatment, she self-reported being cured of mental illness.

¶ 49 Respondent also had a large gap of time in which she did not visit the children during the relevant period, as she saw them in February 2016 and did not see them again until June 2016. Respondent stated that her maternity doctor had advised her not to travel, but she did not provide DCFS with the documentation it requested to verify her claim. Further, such difficulties may have been minimized if respondent had not chosen to move out-of-state in the first place.

¶ 50 As stated, reasonable progress towards the child's return is measured by the parent's compliance with the service plans and the court's directives (*In re C.N.*, 196 Ill. 2d at 216-17), and reasonable progress can be found if the trial court can conclude that it can return the child to the parent in the near future (*In re A.S.*, 2014 IL App (3d) 140060, ¶ 17). Given respondent's low participation in mental health treatment and visitation during the time period alleged, the trial court's finding that respondent failed to make reasonable progress towards the children's return during this time was not against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 51 As a finding of parental unfitness may be based upon evidence sufficient to support a single statutory ground (*In re H.S.*, 2016 IL App (1st) 161589, ¶ 31), we need not examine the trial court's findings that respondent was also unfit because she failed to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the children's welfare, and failed to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for their removal during the same nine-month period.

¶ 52 Respondent next argues that the trial court's finding, that it was in the children's best interests to terminate her parental rights, was against the manifest weight of the evidence. A trial court's ruling that a parent is unfit does not automatically mean that it is in the child's best

interest to terminate parental rights. *In re K.I.*, 2016 IL App (3d) 160010, ¶ 65. Still, during the best interest hearing, "the parent's interest in maintaining the parent-child relationship must yield to the child's interest to live in a stable, permanent, loving home." *In re S.D.*, 2011 IL App (3d) 110184, ¶ 34. In determining a child's best interest, the trial court is required to consider the following statutory factors of the Juvenile Court Act in light of the child's age and developmental needs: (1) the child's physical safety and welfare, including food, shelter, health, and clothing; (2) the development of the child's identity; (3) the child's familial, cultural, and religious background and ties; (4) the child's sense of attachment, including love, sense of security, sense of familiarity, continuity of affection of the child, and least disruptive placement for the child; (5) the child's wishes and goals; (6) the child's community ties, including church, school, and friends; (7) the child's need for permanence; (8) the uniqueness of every family and child; (9) the risks related to substitute care; and (10) the preferences of the persons available to care for the child. 705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05) (West 2016). The court may also consider the nature and length of the relationship that the child has with his or her present caregiver and the effect a change in placement would have on the child's emotional and psychological well-being. *In re Navaeh R.*, 2017 IL App (2d) 170229, ¶ 27. The State must show by a preponderance of the evidence that termination of parental rights is in the child's best interest. *Id.* ¶ 17. We will not disturb a trial court's determination that it is in the child's best interest to terminate parental rights unless the ruling is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *Id.*

¶ 53 Respondent argues that it is clear that the children have a bond with her, as they ran up to her when they saw her and were affectionate towards her. She argues that the evidence also showed that she was appropriate and loving towards them, and would bring them gifts and food

when she visited. Respondent maintains that severing their bond would be harmful to the children and potentially cut them off from their biological family.

¶ 54 We agree with respondent that the record shows that there was mutual affection between her and the children. However, even where a bond exists, termination may still be proper if it would result in stability and permanency for the child. *In re Tyianna J.*, 2017 IL App (1st) 162306, ¶ 100. The foster parents were willing to adopt the children, which would provide permanency for them, whereas respondent was not close to having them returned to her care. Further, Jones testified that the boys had a strong bond with their foster parents and looked to them for support and care. They had been living in the foster home since November 7, 2015, after three previous placements where the caregivers had asked for them to be removed, and Jeremiah's behavior problems had improved after living with the foster parents. The children also had a good relationship with the foster parents' extended family and participated in activities such as the YMCA and summer camp. Accordingly, we conclude that it was not against the manifest weight of the evidence for the trial court to conclude that it was in the children's best interests to terminate respondent's parental rights.

¶ 55 III. CONCLUSION

¶ 56 For the reasons stated, we affirm the judgment of the Winnebago County circuit court.

¶ 57 Affirmed.