2018 IL App (4th) 170951-U

NOS. 4-17-0951, 4-17-0952 cons.

FILED
May 7, 2018
Carla Bender
4th District Appellate
Court, IL

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF ILLINOIS

FOURTH DISTRICT

In re H.J., a Minor	)	Appeal from
	)	Circuit Court of
(The People of the State of Illinois,	)	Sangamon County
Petitioner-Appellee,	)	No. 15JA182
v. (No. 4-17-0951)	)	
Shaundra Johnson,	)	
Respondent-Appellant).	)	
	)	
	)	
In re L.J., a Minor	)	No. 15JA183
	)	
(The People of the State of Illinois,	)	
Petitioner-Appellee,	)	
v. (No. 4-17-0952)	)	Honorable
Shaundra Johnson,	)	Karen S. Tharp,
Respondent-Appellant).	)	Judge Presiding.

JUSTICE DeARMOND delivered the judgment of the court.
Justices Holder White and Steigmann concurred in the judgment.

ORDER

¶ 1 *Held*: The appellate court affirmed, finding the trial court did not err in finding respondent unfit and concluding it was in the minors' best interests that her parental rights be terminated.

¶ 2 In October 2015, the State filed petitions for adjudication of wardship with respect to H.J. and L.J., the minor children of respondent, Shaundra Johnson. In March 2016, the trial court made the minors wards of the court and placed custody and guardianship with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). In April 2017, the State filed motions to terminate respondent's parental rights. The court found respondent unfit and determined it was

in the minors' best interests that respondent's parental rights be terminated.

¶ 3 On appeal, respondent argues the trial court erred in finding her unfit and in terminating her parental rights. We affirm.

¶ 4 I. BACKGROUND

¶ 5 In October 2015, the State filed petitions for adjudication of wardship with respect to H.J., born in 2008, and L.J., born in 2011, the minor children of respondent and Joseph Johnson. The petitions alleged the minors were neglected pursuant to section 2-3(1) of the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 (705 ILCS 405/2-3(1) (West Supp. 2015)) because (1) their environment was injurious to their welfare due to Johnson's drug use, (2) they were not receiving the proper care and supervision necessary for their well-being in that respondent failed to make a proper care plan for them, and (3) they were not receiving the proper care and supervision necessary for their well-being in that Johnson failed to make a proper care plan for them.

¶ 6 At the shelter-care hearing, Jodie Williams, a DCFS investigator, testified a hotline report indicated the minors had been left in Johnson's care after respondent left to go to Boise, Idaho, on October 10, 2015. Prior to that date, Johnson was arrested for driving under the influence and had used crack cocaine; both of which were known to respondent when she left the children in Johnson's care. After respondent left, neighbors indicated she asked them to check on the minors. On October 11, 2015, the neighbors observed Johnson engaged in a suspected drug buy on the street while the minors were in the car. Per respondent's request, the neighbors took the minors from Johnson. Respondent told the neighbors she would return on a Tuesday, but she failed to do so and, in fact, did not return until the morning of the shelter-care hearing on October 15, 2015. The neighbors returned the minors to Johnson on October 13, 2015, but they then observed the minors unsupervised near the road. The neighbors called the police.

¶ 7 Williams testified respondent had "convictions of possession and manufacture and delivery of controlled substances in Idaho," as well as "grand theft." She also had her parental rights terminated in Idaho. Given the "long history of drug use on both sides," Williams had "real" concerns about respondent's ability to protect the minors and make proper care plans for them.

¶ 8 The trial court found probable cause to believe the minors were neglected based on Johnson's drug use and respondent's decision to leave the children with him. Finding an immediate and urgent necessity to remove the minors from the home, the court entered an order granting temporary custody to DCFS.

¶ 9 In January 2016, the trial court allowed DCFS to increase unsupervised overnight visitation with respondent. On February 18, 2016, Johnson stipulated to the State's third allegation of neglect. The court accepted the stipulation and found the minors neglected.

¶ 10 The March 2016 dispositional report indicated respondent completed her drug-and-alcohol assessment and her drug drops had been negative for illegal substances. She was participating in counseling, receiving parenting instruction, and visiting with her caseworker.

¶ 11 In its dispositional order, the trial court found respondent unfit, unable, or unwilling for some reason other than financial circumstances alone to care for, protect, train, educate, supervise, or discipline the minors. The court made the minors wards of the court and placed custody and guardianship of them with DCFS.

¶ 12 In April 2017, the State filed motions to terminate respondent's parental rights. The motions alleged respondent was unfit because she failed to (1) maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the minors' welfare (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2016)); (2) make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for the minors'

removal from her (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(i) (West 2016)); and (3) make reasonable progress toward the return of the minors to her within nine months after the adjudication of neglect (February 18, 2016, to November 18, 2016) (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(ii) (West 2016)).

¶ 13 In August 2017, the trial court conducted a hearing on the State's motions. Macon County Sheriff's Deputy Justin Pinckard testified he responded to a domestic disturbance on February 12, 2017, at a residence in Forsyth. Both respondent and Donald Benson had their names on the lease. Benson stated he had been in a verbal disagreement with respondent based on her belief that he was seeing a coworker. After Benson took respondent's phone and keys and locked her out of the residence, she shattered the window to gain entry. Pinckard described respondent as being "distraught," but no one was arrested.

¶ 14 Beth Hartman, a caseworker with Addus, testified she worked with respondent and Johnson on visits, parenting, employment, and housing. In late 2015 and early 2016, respondent was cooperative. When she started working, "it was hard to meet at different times with her schedule." Hartman stated the children were returned to respondent in April 2016 but removed in August 2016.

¶ 15 Bryanna Gardner testified she had been employed by Heritage Behavioral Health Center from January 2016 to June 2017. Respondent began mental-health counseling with Gardner in October 2016. For each treatment plan, the client "states a goal that they want to work on for treatment." Respondent's treatment plan goals dealt with working on her anxiety, processing her emotions, and substance-abuse treatment. Respondent missed multiple appointments, at times claiming she had to work or was sick. In January 2017, Gardner created a LOCUS report, which helps determine whether treatment should be increased or decreased. Respondent's score indicated she should be involved in outpatient therapy. In March 2017,

respondent called Gardner and said she did not want Gardner as her counselor any longer.

¶ 16 On cross-examination, Gardner testified respondent attended five sessions and "progress was being made as far as her being in counseling." However, respondent was not close to being successfully discharged from therapy in March 2017.

¶ 17 Gloria Sampson, a therapist at Heritage Behavioral Health Center, testified respondent was placed in the emotional-management group. During the group sessions, topics included substance-abuse recovery and relapse prevention. Respondent "participated pretty well." Respondent attended more group sessions than she missed. Sampson stated she was not requested to provide a recommendation for respondent's successful or unsuccessful discharge.

¶ 18 Craig Monnett, a visitation supervisor at Addus, testified he worked with respondent on parenting issues. Prior to the minors being returned to her home, respondent's level of participation with Monnett was "good." She was "very cooperative" and "never missed parenting." After the minors were removed, respondent participated, but "it was a tough time" due to the situation. Monnett stated he had concerns about respondent's paramour. During her time working with Monnett, respondent had "at least" four different jobs. Monnett was not concerned with the changes in jobs because respondent "was trying to better herself." Monnett stated respondent had missed one parenting meeting, but she was not engaged in other services at the time of the hearing because she had not contacted him.

¶ 19 On cross-examination, Monnett testified the children came back into care in August 2016 because of respondent's relapse, which she blamed on Johnson. Monnett had a conversation with respondent in September 2016 regarding his concern about having the minors around Benson because of his criminal background. Respondent stated Benson's criminal offenses occurred when he was younger, but Monnett believed she was making excuses for him.

Monnett told respondent she needed to get away from "these bad influences and do it on her own." Monnett and Herbord discussed their concerns about Benson's past with respondent, but respondent "didn't understand it." Although H.J. had stated she was afraid of Benson, respondent told Monnett "that couldn't be because they got along really well when they were there."

¶ 20 In January 2017, Monnett drove to respondent's Forsyth home and saw Benson outside the house. In March 2017, Monnett drove by the home and saw a window had been broken. Although respondent had stated she was in the process of moving, Monnett saw no sign of it. Monnett agreed respondent's issue was not her ability to parent the minors; instead, it was putting the minors before Benson, Johnson, or drugs.

¶ 21 DCFS child-welfare specialist Tara Herbord testified she was assigned to the minors' case in October 2015. Respondent's initial service plan tasks required her to complete a substance-abuse assessment, drug drops, mental-health counseling, and parenting classes, as well as maintain a stable home environment, have a legal means of income, and attend monthly meetings. Prior to April 2016, respondent was compliant with the plan. The minors were returned home in April 2016 because "the parents were cooperative with their services." Respondent completed drug tests between April and August 2016, and she had a positive test for cocaine on July 7 and a diluted drop on July 29. Respondent admitted her drug use and stated she "had used a few times." Respondent stated she relapsed due to "the stress of caring for the children all by herself" and the stress of drug use by Johnson, her sister, and her friend.

¶ 22 Also in August 2016, DCFS became concerned about respondent living with her paramour, Benson, because she hid that fact, his criminal background, and one of the minors stated she was afraid of him. The trial court accepted certified copies of Benson's convictions

for the Class 3 felony of retail theft in excess of $150 (March 2014) and the Class 3 felony of escape (May 2014). Herbord told respondent "she wasn't to be dating felons and not [to] bring them around the children." Respondent indicated she understood Herbord's concerns but she did not agree with them. In September 2016, Herbord told respondent the minors would not be able to be returned home if she continued to live with Benson. At the administrative case review in October 2016, respondent was rated unsatisfactory because of her relapse and Benson living in the home.

¶ 23 In March 2017, respondent's progress was again rated unsatisfactory. While she was complying with her drug drops, she had a diluted drop in December 2016. Respondent claimed she had been drinking a lot of water and she had been taking antibiotics. Herbord stated respondent "was going sporadically" to drug counseling. She also remained involved with Benson. Respondent moved from Forsyth to Decatur to live by herself. To verify this arrangement, Herbord made unannounced visits. At the new residence, Herbord stated it "looked unlived in." When Herbord confronted respondent about seeing her car at the address she had shared with Benson, respondent stated she was there "to let the dogs out."

¶ 24 Herbord testified respondent "was going sporadically" to mental-health counseling in March 2017. Concerns about respondent's parenting instruction remained due to her continued relationship with Benson. In March 2017, DCFS was not close to returning the minors to either parent because both were noncompliant with services. During that time, respondent attended the majority of her visits with the minors, and Herbord had no concerns with respondent during those visits.

¶ 25 In July 2017, Herbord made an unannounced visit to respondent's home. When she knocked on the door, a dog started barking. She then heard "a little boy's voice" tell the dog

to "shut up." Herbord exchanged texts with respondent, who claimed she was not home. Herbord responded that she knew respondent was home, and respondent eventually opened the door. Herbord asked to look inside the residence to see who was present, but respondent refused. Herbord believed a male was present because of "some men's work boots outside."

¶ 26 Respondent testified the minors were removed from her care in August 2016 because she had relapsed in July and was in a relationship with Benson. Respondent stated she began dating Benson in February 2016 and told Herbord about the relationship in June 2016. She "thought the case was going to be over," so she decided to move in with Benson. She decided to tell Herbord about the relationship because she "was ready to be honest about everything" and wanted to "come clean with her." She believed it was appropriate for Benson to be in her life because "he was a good person" and her children were safe when around him. Respondent stated she never told Herbord about the February 2017 domestic-violence incident because "it wasn't a domestic-violence incident" and no one got arrested. The relationship ended in March 2017 when she was able to move into her own residence.

¶ 27 After her relapse, respondent "began working a 12-step program again," obtained a sponsor, and completed treatment. Respondent stated she was only required to attend one hour of drug counseling per week, and she only called to cancel when she was "completely drained" from working long hours. She stated she successfully completed drug treatment with her counselor, Carl Anderson.

¶ 28 On cross-examination, respondent testified she did not believe there was an issue with her moving in with Benson, only that she did not tell Herbord about the relationship. She stated it took time to end the relationship with Benson because she did not have enough money to get a place of her own.

¶ 29 Following arguments, the trial court noted the minors had been returned to respondent in April 2016. She then had a positive test for cocaine on July 7, 2016, and a diluted drop on July 29, 2016. Respondent's service plan required her to tell her caseworker if anyone was living with her. However, respondent never told Herbord about signing a lease with Benson and moving in with him. Respondent continued to live with Benson through February 2017. The court noted respondent's counselor concluded she had not completed her counseling goals involving anxiety and stress. The court concluded respondent failed to make reasonable progress and reasonable efforts during the applicable time frames. While respondent showed a reasonable degree of interest and concern as to her children's welfare, the court concluded she did not show a reasonable degree of responsibility. Thus, the court found respondent unfit on all three of the allegations in the State's petition.

¶ 30 At the best-interests hearing, Monnett testified the end of visits during the early part of the case resulted in "a lot of emotion." As time went on, "there's very little emotion from the children." Monnett agreed there has been a detachment on the children's part as to visits with their parents and there were times that H.J. "didn't want to go." To facilitate Johnson's visitation, Monnett noted he picked him up from respondent's house in October and November 2017.

¶ 31 Cynthia Wadsworth, a licensed clinical social worker, testified she began counseling H.J. in February 2016 and L.J. in August 2016. At the beginning of her counseling sessions, H.J. was "very sad" and "very dejected." At times, H.J. would say she missed her parents and thought "she was a bad girl because her mother was upset" during visits. Over time, H.J. no longer took "responsibility for her mother or father's behaviors or emotions anymore." Wadsworth stated L.J. has opened up about her feelings over time. L.J. states she misses her

parents but refers to her foster placement as her home.

¶ 32 When the minors were removed from their parents' care in August 2016, they returned to the same foster home, which gave them continuity. Wadsworth stated both children have an attachment to their parents, but there have been two "significant" and "notable" breaks in that attachment due to respondent's inability to provide quality care for them. While there would be "grief" if the rights of their parents were terminated, Wadsworth believed "there would not be irreparable harm." Wadsworth stated the minors "are in limbo" and need permanence.

¶ 33 Herbord testified both H.J. and L.J. are placed together in a traditional foster care home. They are making progress in their placement, and their foster parents attend to their educational and medical needs. Both minors have shown attachment to their foster family. Herbord stated the foster parents are willing to provide permanence for the children through adoption. Herbord also noted the minors have shown attachment to respondent. While it might take time for the minors to process the termination of respondent's parental rights, Herbord stated continued counseling would help them. Herbord acknowledged relatives had come forward and requested placement of the minors with them, but home studies were incomplete.

¶ 34 Following arguments, the trial court found it in the minors' best interests that respondent's parental rights be terminated. The court noted the children's need for permanence and found respondent and Johnson have not "taken the steps they need to do in order to be reunified with their children." Respondent appealed, and this court consolidated the cases.

¶ 35 II. ANALYSIS

¶ 36 A. Unfitness Findings

¶ 37 Respondent argues the trial court's findings of unfitness were against the manifest weight of the evidence. We disagree.

¶ 38 In a proceeding to terminate a respondent's parental rights, the State must prove unfitness by clear and convincing evidence. *In re Donald A.G.*, 221 Ill. 2d 234, 244, 850 N.E.2d 172, 177-78 (2006). " 'A determination of parental unfitness involves factual findings and credibility assessments that the trial court is in the best position to make.' " *In re Richard H.*, 376 Ill. App. 3d 162, 165, 875 N.E.2d 1198, 1201 (2007) (quoting *In re Tiffany M.*, 353 Ill. App. 3d 883, 889-90, 819 N.E.2d 813, 819 (2004)). A reviewing court accords great deference to a trial court's finding of parental unfitness, and such a finding will not be disturbed on appeal unless it is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *In re N.T.*, 2015 IL App (1st) 142391, ¶ 27, 31 N.E.3d 254. " 'A court's decision regarding a parent's fitness is against the manifest weight of the evidence only where the opposite conclusion is clearly apparent.' " *In re M.I.*, 2016 IL 120232, ¶ 21, 77 N.E.3d 69 (quoting *In re Gwynne P.*, 215 Ill. 2d 340, 354, 830 N.E.2d 508, 517 (2005)).

¶ 39 In this case, the trial court found respondent unfit for failing to make reasonable progress toward the return of the minors to her within nine months after the adjudication of neglect. The State specified the nine-month period to be February 18, 2016, to November 18, 2016.

¶ 40 "Reasonable progress" is an objective standard that "may be found when the trial court can conclude the parent's progress is sufficiently demonstrable and of such quality that the child can be returned to the parent in the near future." *In re Janine M.A.*, 342 Ill. App. 3d 1041, 1051, 796 N.E.2d 1175, 1183 (2003).

> "[T]he benchmark for measuring a parent's 'progress toward the return of the child' under section 1(D)(m) of the Adoption Act encompasses the parent's compliance with the service plans and

> the court's directives, in light of the condition which gave rise to the removal of the child, and in light of other conditions which later become known and which would prevent the court from returning custody of the child to the parent." *In re C.N.*, 196 Ill. 2d 181, 216-17, 752 N.E.2d 1030, 1050 (2001).

"The law does not afford a parent an unlimited period of time to make reasonable progress toward regaining custody of the children." *In re Davonte L.*, 298 Ill. App. 3d 905, 921, 699 N.E.2d 1062, 1072 (1998). "At a minimum, reasonable progress requires measurable or demonstrable movement toward the goal of reunification." *In re Daphnie E.*, 368 Ill. App. 3d 1052, 1067, 859 N.E.2d 123, 137 (2006).

¶ 41 In the case *sub judice*, the minors were initially taken into care based on Johnson's failure to make a proper care plan for them. This was after respondent had left the minors with Johnson, who had allegedly used crack cocaine near that time, engaged in a suspected drug transaction with the minors in the car, and then left them unsupervised by the road. Although the minors were returned to respondent in April 2016, they were removed in August 2016 because of respondent's drug relapse in July 2016. While Gardner testified respondent wanted to work on her stress issues during counseling, she did not apply what she learned, as she claimed the relapse was triggered by "the stress of caring for the children all by herself" and the stress caused by the drug use by Johnson, her sister, and her friend.

¶ 42 Herbord testified DCFS became concerned in August 2016 that respondent was living with Benson, given his criminal history. Herbord told respondent she was not supposed to date felons or bring felons around the minors. While respondent understood Herbord's concerns, she did not agree with them and thought Benson "was a good person." The trial court took

judicial notice of Benson's two Class 3 felony convictions.

¶ 43 While respondent acknowledges making "some mistakes" during the relevant time period, she contends she made "objective and reasonable progress to fix those mistakes." However, Herbord rated her unsatisfactory on her service plan goals due to her relapse and living with a convicted felon, despite being told Benson could not live with her. The evidence indicated respondent's progress, if any, was not of such quality that the minors could be returned to her in the near future. Accordingly, the trial court's finding of unfitness on this ground was not against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 44 The trial court also found respondent unfit for failing to maintain a reasonable degree of responsibility as to the minors' welfare. Before finding a parent unfit under section 1(D)(b) of the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2016)), the court must "examine the parent's conduct concerning the child in the context of the circumstances in which that conduct occurred." *In re Adoption of Syck*, 138 Ill. 2d 255, 278, 562 N.E.2d 174, 185 (1990). Circumstances to consider may include the parent's difficulty in obtaining transportation to the child's residence, the parent's financial limitations, the actions or statements of others hindering or discouraging visitation, "and whether the parent's failure to visit the child was motivated by a need to cope with other aspects of his or her life or by true indifference to, and lack of concern for, the child. [Citation.]" *Syck*, 138 Ill. 2d at 279, 562 N.E.2d at 185.

¶ 45 "The parent may be found unfit for failing to maintain either interest, or concern, or responsibility; proof of all three is not required." *Richard H.*, 376 Ill. App. 3d at 166, 875 N.E.2d at 1202. Moreover, "a parent is not fit merely because she has demonstrated some interest or affection toward her child; rather, her interest, concern[,] and responsibility must be reasonable." *In re Jaron Z.*, 348 Ill. App. 3d 239, 259, 810 N.E.2d 108, 125 (2004).

¶ 46 Herbord rated respondent's progress as unsatisfactory in March 2017. While she not only had a relapse in July 2016, respondent also had a diluted drop in December 2016. Moreover, concerns about respondent's parenting instruction remained due to her continued relationship with Benson. She minimized a February 2017 domestic-violence incident, which necessitated Benson's eight-year-old son calling the police. Despite Herbord's repeated concerns, respondent did not end the relationship with Benson until March 2017. At that time, DCFS was not close to returning the minors to respondent because she was not compliant with services.

¶ 47 "Completion of service plan objectives can *** be considered evidence of a parent's concern, interest, and responsibility." *Daphnie E.*, 368 Ill. App. 3d at 1065, 859 N.E.2d at 135. Here, the evidence indicated respondent failed to complete the majority of her service plan goals. Given her unsatisfactory rating, her drug use, and her continued relationship with a convicted felon, respondent's responsibility toward her children cannot be deemed reasonable. Thus, we find the trial court's finding of unfitness under section 1(D)(b) was not against the manifest weight of the evidence. See *Jaron Z.*, 348 Ill. App. 3d at 260, 810 N.E.2d at 125 (noting the failure to comply with a service plan can warrant a finding of unfitness under section 1(D)(b)). Because the grounds of unfitness are independent, we need not address the remaining ground as to reasonable efforts. See *In re H.D.*, 343 Ill. App. 3d 483, 493, 797 N.E.2d 1112, 1120 (2003) ("As the grounds for unfitness are independent, the trial court's judgment may be affirmed if the evidence supports the finding of unfitness on any one of the alleged statutory grounds.").

¶ 48 B. Best-Interests Finding

¶ 49 Respondent argues the trial court's finding it was in the minors' best interests for

her parental rights to be terminated was against the manifest weight of the evidence. We disagree.

¶ 50 "Courts will not lightly terminate parental rights because of the fundamental importance inherent in those rights." *In re Veronica J.*, 371 Ill. App. 3d 822, 831, 867 N.E.2d 1134, 1142 (2007) (citing *In re M.H.*, 196 Ill. 2d 356, 362-63, 751 N.E.2d 1134, 1140 (2001)). Once the trial court finds the parent unfit, "all considerations, including the parent's rights, yield to the best interests of the child." *In re Julian K.*, 2012 IL App (1st) 112841, ¶ 80, 966 N.E.2d 1107. When considering whether termination of parental rights is in a child's best interests, the trial court must consider a number of factors within "the context of the child's age and developmental needs[.]" 705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05) (West 2016). These include the following:

> "(1) the child's physical safety and welfare; (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 attachments, including love, security, familiarity, continuity of affection, and the least[-]disruptive placement alternative; (5) the child's wishes and long-term goals; (6) the child's community ties; (7) the child's need for permanence, including the need for stability and continuity of relationships with parent figures and siblings; (8) the uniqueness of every family and child; (9) the risks related to substitute care; and (10) the preferences of the person available to care for the child." *Daphnie E.*, 368 Ill. App. 3d at 1072, 859 N.E.2d at 141.

See also 705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05)(a) to (j) (West 2016).

¶ 51 A trial court's finding that termination of parental rights is in a child's best interests will not be reversed on appeal unless it is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *In re Dal. D.*, 2017 IL App (4th) 160893, ¶ 53, 74 N.E.3d 1185. The court's decision will be found to be "against the manifest weight of the evidence only if the opposite conclusion is clearly apparent or the decision is unreasonable, arbitrary, or not based on the evidence." *In re Keyon R.*, 2017 IL App (2d) 160657, ¶ 16, 73 N.E.3d 616.

¶ 52 In this case, Wadsworth acknowledged an attachment between respondent and her children, but the minors have had two "significant" breaks due to respondent's inability to provide quality care for them. While Wadsworth stated the minors would grieve the termination of respondent's parental rights, she believed "there would not be irreparable harm." Moreover, Wadsworth stated the minors have been "in limbo" and needed permanence in their lives.

¶ 53 Herbord stated H.J. and L.J. are placed in a traditional foster home, they are making progress, and their needs are being met. Their foster parents are also willing to provide permanence for the children through adoption.

¶ 54 Monett testified he facilitated Johnson's visitation with his children in October and November 2017 by picking him up and dropping him off at respondent's residence. While respondent stated Johnson was not residing with her at the time of the unfitness hearing, she noted they have "date nights a couple times a week" and hoped to repair their relationship. Johnson has a 2015 felony conviction for possession of a controlled substance, and the trial court stated he had still not addressed his substance-abuse problems.

¶ 55 Here, the evidence indicated the minors are in a good home and their needs are being met. Their current placement offers them a chance at permanence, which respondent has been unable to provide them. Moreover, the evidence indicated respondent has reunited with

Johnson, who has not dealt with his problems, and such a relationship has not been shown to be in the minors' best interests. The trial court had "absolutely no doubt" that respondent loves her children, but the main issue concerned the minors' need for permanence. The court found respondent and Johnson had not "taken the steps they need to do in order to be reunified with their children." The children had been in care since October 2015, and respondent was no closer to having the children returned to her in December 2017. The court stated the minors need a sense of security, continuity of affection, and permanence in their lives, and it did not "see how to give those things to the children without terminating [respondent's] parental rights." Considering the evidence and the best interests of the minors, we find the court's order terminating respondent's parental rights was not against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 56 III. CONCLUSION

¶ 57 For the reasons stated, we affirm the trial court's judgment.

¶ 58 Affirmed.