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When a Parent Snatches a Child

Tammy Dowis was reunited with her daughter Alicia with the help of MidPenn and a court order. "MidPenn was there for me when I needed them. We're doing great now," says Tammy.

Tammy, of Red Lion, was recently divorced from her husband of twelve years but she bore him no ill will. He was jobless and homeless but she made their eleven year old daughter, Alicia, available to him for frequent visits. But he began to exhibit signs of erratic behavior. When he made suicidal threats and put his fist through a wall, Tammy contacted Crisis Intervention.

Alicia's Dad thought Tammy was going to limit his visits. He went to her school in Red Lion and signed her out, telling her he was moving to Florida and taking her along. "I was beside myself," says Tammy. "I called the police but when they found out I didn't have a court order there was nothing they could do to stop him."

A social worker at Children & Youth directed her to MidPenn Legal Services in York. Attorney Gerry Studzinski had seen it all before. He promptly filed a Custody Complaint and got a hearing date within two weeks. "He assured me that what her Dad had done was wrong and that the court would back me up," says Tammy.

The court directed the case be held in Pennsylvania as it was the home state. Alicia was returned to Tammy who drove to the airport in Washington D.C. to pick her up. Shortly afterwards the father participated in the Custody Conciliation Conference by phone. He later signed a paper agreeing to follow the terms of the court order.

Alicia will take more trips to Florida but it will be with the protection of a court order. "She just finished fifth grade and she's getting ready to go with her Dad for the summer. I'll miss her but I know she has to see her Dad, too. "I know he will return her because we have the court order. I'm not worried. MidPenn was there for me when I needed them. We're doing great now."

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Tammy Dowis and daughter Alicia