

Case Study on Cultural Brokering: *Alvernia*

Alvernia R., a 20 year old woman, moved from Puerto Rico with her mother, Mrs. R., two years ago. Alvernia was diagnosed with cerebral palsy as a young child. She has difficulties in walking, moving her arms and fine motor activities. She is currently assisted by poorly fitted crutches and her mother to move about and complete daily living activities. She attended school sporadically in PR and received some clinical services. Alvernia enjoyed school and being with other children. Mrs. R became frustrated with the disability service limitations in San Juan for Alvernia and left a well paying professional position to move to the U.S.

At the time of Alvernia's diagnosis, her parents were told to place her in a mental institution because she would always be a "burden". Close relatives agreed with this determination and described Alvernia's disability as a "punishment from God". Mrs. R. felt particularly responsible for her daughter's condition and constantly relived her activities during her pregnancy. Due to this belief, Mrs. R's vowed that she would care for her daughter to the exclusion of her or other family members' needs. She was convinced that she would find the best services in the U.S. And left their country of origin.

Alvernia's extended family still resides in Puerto Rico. Although they maintain contact through phone, letters and vacations, Mrs. R. and Alvernia miss them greatly. Prior to their move, the family maintained almost daily personal contact. Mr. R. has no intention of moving to the U.S. and will not divorce Mrs. R. because of strong religious beliefs. Mr. R is also embarrassed by his daughter's condition and feels guilt because of this emotion and not being able to help her.

Alvernia attended special education classes in her high school and is now eager to get a job. Mrs. R is uncertain of her daughter's education and had difficulty understanding information pertaining to her daughter's disability. She tried to participate in school meetings but felt "stupid and helpless" at not understanding the jargon and necessary action steps. Alvernia wants to be a hairdresser but her mother strongly discourages this preference because of her gross and fine motor difficulties. Mrs. R is also afraid that others would tease her.

Alvernia and her mother met with a vocational rehabilitation counselor through school but Mrs. R. felt that the counselor was discounting her role as a mother. The counselor encouraged Alvernia to follow her "dream job" despite what other people felt about her capabilities. Alvernia became hopeful of attaining a career choice following her meeting. Mrs. R., however, did not want her daughter to have contact with the counselor again and became suspicious of the vocational rehabilitation service system. This difference in opinion caused a conflict within the family. Alvernia and her mother continue to argue about pursuing a job and receiving vocational rehabilitation services. Mrs. R. has become increasingly depressed because of her daughter's increasing assertiveness and great distance from her husband and family. Alvernia now talks about becoming independent by getting her own apartment and dating. Mrs. R. still feels that her priority must focus on the protection and care of her daughter.