



(West 2024)), contending the minors were dependent. The petition alleged the minors' legal guardian, respondent, had been admitted to the hospital with an undetermined release date and the minors were without care. Prior to the State's petition, respondent, who is not biologically related to the minors, had been appointed guardian in La Porte County, Indiana. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) became involved with the matter in January 2025 to assist with issues regarding respondent's ability to care for the minors. Specifically, there were issues related to the minors' aggressive behaviors and respondent's health.

¶ 5 In May 2025, the State filed a supplemental petition pursuant to section 2-3(1)(b) of the Juvenile Court Act (*id.* § 2-3(1)(b)), contending the minors were neglected based on an injurious environment. That same month, the matter proceeded to hearing wherein respondent admitted to the allegations within the original petition alleging the minors were dependent. The State withdrew its supplemental petition. The trial court entered an adjudicatory order finding the minors dependent.

¶ 6 Following a June 2025 dispositional hearing, the trial court commented on the uniqueness of the case by noting the minors' biological parents were not involved and respondent had been appointed guardian through the court in Indiana prior to moving to Illinois. The court stated respondent had cared for the minors for a majority of their lives and discussed the minors' specialized needs. The court entered a dispositional order making the minors wards of the court. Custody and guardianship of the minors was placed with respondent, who was ordered to cooperate with DCFS directives and services.

¶ 7 The matter proceeded to a permanency hearing in October 2025. Respondent testified she had developed a written plan for the minors if she were to become hospitalized again. The trial court admonished respondent about cooperating with DCFS promptly. The court also

explained to respondent that the minors needed psychological services. The court noted issues with the minors' need for counseling services not being addressed and respondent failing to cooperate sufficiently with DCFS. Ultimately, the court continued respondent's guardianship and described her efforts and progress as "borderline."

¶ 8 The parties returned for a permanency hearing in January 2026. The trial court took judicial notice of a status report prepared by caseworker Gabrielle Altan. The report stated as follows. Respondent had "become more guarded" since the last permanency hearing and "continue[d] to argue" with the agency for requested compliance causing delays. Respondent stopped permitting the minors to speak privately with Altan, noting respondent "linger[ed] within ear shot and interject[ed] her own opinions or correct[ed] the [minors] when they tr[ie]d to speak." Respondent was observed escalating conflict with Al. G. Respondent complained to Altan that she was "not providing appropriate support to her on multiple occasions." Altan was concerned respondent was "not disclosing incidents that occur and minimizing the severity of issues within the home." Altan was also concerned the individuals respondent identified as caretakers for the minors were she to become hospitalized again were "theoretical options," including out-of-state agencies, "old college friends," and distant relatives "who would want to meet the [minors] prior to agreeing to care for them." Respondent appeared to minimize her medical issues. The report stated the minors' basic needs were being met by respondent. Additionally, respondent had successfully completed parenting courses and showed improved scores. The report further stated, "[H]owever, [Altan] ha[d] not observed [respondent] utilizing any of the skills or techniques taught in the curriculum with either child during home visits." According to Altan, respondent struggled to discipline the children and escalated conflicts with the minors when they were upset, "as she nags, argues, and does not give them space." Regarding Al. G.'s behavioral health counseling, the

report showed concerns about respondent's parenting, "noting she ha[d] been observed to argue with the [minors] in the waiting room and that she talk[ed] over them at visits, dominating the visits with her own agenda rather than letting the provider do what [was] needed." The counselor also described a "perceived favoritism [respondent] display[ed] towards [An. G.] [that] may contribute to [Al. G.'s] resentment." The report concluded by recommending the minors be removed from respondent's care.

¶ 9 Respondent addressed the trial court, stating Altan's status report contained errors. She complained of a lack of communication between herself and the agency and a lack of supportive services. She noted a lack of services available to her, such as alternatives to calling the police and psychiatric services. She stated she did utilize oxygen treatment "more when it's cold out or [when she] catch[es] a cold." She also said her cardiologist informed her she was doing well. She complained about Al. G.'s aggressive behavior. She reiterated the minors had been in her care since they were five years old.

¶ 10 The trial court stated it did not doubt respondent's love for the minors. The court was, nonetheless, concerned about respondent's "ability to meet the needs" of the minors and discussed her lack of cooperation. The court retained wardship over the minors and removed respondent as guardian. The court placed guardianship with DCFS, concluding it did "not believe that [respondent was] able to parent" the minors. The court then stated:

"All right. So we need to enter a permanency order with the Court's findings. Although we are at permanency review hearing, the Court's findings, I think, is such that as I am removing guardianship from [respondent] and she is not a biological parent to these children, I think the case law, the Supreme Court basically says

that if I remove guardianship from a person who is guardian, they're no longer a party to this case. And that's what the Court is going to do today.

In terms of a permanency goal, return home is—I don't want to say not an option because—well, we'll return the children possibly somewhere, but it's not really what we would call return home pursuant to the statute because [respondent] is not a biological parent. If the children were to go back to her, it would have to be under the guise of a guardianship. She would have to be restored as the guardian or be reappointed as the guardian.”

The court set the permanency goal to guardianship. The court also admonished respondent as to her appellate rights.

¶ 11 This appeal followed.

¶ 12 II. ANALYSIS

¶ 13 On appeal, respondent argues the trial court's findings regarding the minors' health, safety, and best interests to transfer guardianship from her to DCFS were against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 14 The State disputes respondent's contention on appeal and, additionally, challenges whether this court has jurisdiction to consider respondent's appeal. The State notes permanency orders are generally not considered final, appealable orders. The State cites *In re Faith B.*, 216 Ill. 2d 1 (2005).

¶ 15 In *Faith B.*, our supreme court explained, generally, permanency orders are “interlocutory, nonfinal orders, not subject to an appeal as of right.” *Id.* at 16. Permanency orders

are nonfinal because they are not fixed determinations, but rather, are subject to statutory reevaluation every six months (or sooner) and amenable to revisions until the permanency goal is achieved. *Id.* (quoting *In re Curtis B.*, 203 Ill. 2d 53, 59-60 (2002), citing 705 ILCS 405/2-28(2) (West 1998)). A permanency order may be considered final, however, where a permanency goal has been reached. *Id.* at 17-18; see *In re K.C.*, 2024 IL App (1st) 231166, ¶ 107.

¶ 16 The *Faith B.* court noted the permanency order in that case was “atypical in several ways, each of which indicate[d] that it was intended to be a final and permanent order.” *Faith B.*, 216 Ill. 2d at 17. The court noted the trial court had (1) explicitly stated the order was final and appealable, (2) declined to set any further permanency hearings, (3) discussed the permanency goal as the only acceptable plan, and (4) found the permanency goal was achieved at the time it was set. *Id.*

¶ 17 The State argues, like *Faith B.*, this case is also atypical. Specifically, the State focuses on the trial court’s statement that it was possible the minors could return to respondent’s care if she were reappointed as guardian.

¶ 18 As the court in *Faith B.* stated, “[i]t is, of course, the nature of the order \*\*\* that is relevant in determining whether appellate jurisdiction exits.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Id.* at 16. “Specifically, the lynchpin of our determination that permanency orders are not final and appealable is the fact that they are only temporary and subject to modification.” *Id.* at 17.

¶ 19 In the instant case, the nature of the order was to remove respondent as guardian. As the trial court correctly noted, respondent had no parental rights to the minors, and, as such, she would no longer remain a party to the case. Thus, there was nothing temporary about the order as it pertained to respondent. The court’s words appeared to leave open the possibility that respondent could be reappointed as guardian in the future. However, in context, this was because

the permanency goal had been changed to guardianship. We find the facts of this case show the court's permanency order was neither temporary nor subject to modification as it pertained to respondent. Therefore, we conclude the permanency order was final and appealable.

¶ 20 As to the merits of respondent's appeal, she contends the record shows she had been the minors' primary caretaker for a majority of their lives, which led the trial court to making her guardian in the first place. She notes the October 2025 permanency review hearing revealed she had created a written plan to identify individuals who could temporarily care for the minors should she ever become hospitalized again. Although the court described her efforts and progress as "borderline," she maintains the court still found it was in the minors' best interests for her to remain guardian. She also argues the record shows she ultimately signed all of the requested release of information and consent forms DCFS requested. She notes her statements directly to the court that the caseworker "misunderstood and mishandled information she provided" and noted her statements about the lack of receiving services she requested from the caseworker. She maintains the court's decision to remove her as guardian was against the manifest weight of the evidence because she continued to cooperate and the evidence "primarily reflected communication difficulties and disagreements with service providers rather than clear evidence that [she] refused services or failed to cooperate with the case plan."

¶ 21 The Juvenile Court Act requires the trial court to set a permanency goal for a minor following a dispositional hearing. 705 ILCS 405/2-22(1) (West 2024). "As this court has explained, a permanency hearing is essentially a continuation of the dispositional hearing, and—just as is the case with a dispositional hearing—there are no rules of evidence governing what the court may receive and consider at a permanency hearing." *In re M.D.*, 2022 IL App (4th) 210288, ¶ 72. The setting of a permanency goal is governed by section 2-28 of the Juvenile Court Act (705

ILCS 405/2-28 (West 2024)). Under this section, the court may choose from eight permanency goal options. See *id.* § 2-28(2.3)(A)-(H). The court is required to “set a permanency goal that is in the best interest of the child.” *Id.* § 2-28(2.4). “In determining that goal, the court shall consult with the minor in an age-appropriate manner regarding the proposed permanency or transition plan for the minor.” *Id.* Additionally, “[t]he court’s permanency goal] determination shall include the following factors:

(A) Age of the child.

(B) Options available for permanence, including both out-of-state and in-state placement options.

(C) Current placement of the child and the intent of the family regarding subsidized guardianship and adoption.

(D) Emotional, physical, and mental status or condition of the child.

(E) Types of services previously offered and whether or not the services were successful and, if not successful, the reasons the services failed.

(F) Availability of services currently needed and whether the services exist.

(G) Status of siblings of the minor.

(H) If the minor is not currently in a placement likely to achieve permanency, whether there is an identified and willing potential permanent caregiver for the minor, and if so, that potential permanent caregiver’s intent regarding guardianship and

adoption.” *Id.* § 2-28(2.4)(A)-(H).

¶ 22 Furthermore, “[p]rior to changing the goal to guardianship, the [trial] court shall consider the following:

(i) whether the agency has discussed adoption and guardianship with the caregiver and what preference, if any, the caregiver has as to the permanency goal;

(ii) whether the agency has discussed adoption and guardianship with the minor, as age-appropriate, and what preference, if any, the minor has as to the permanency goal;

(iii) whether the minor is of sufficient age to remember the minor’s parents and if the child values this familial identity;

(iv) whether the minor is placed with a relative \*\*\*; and

(v) whether the parent or parents have been informed about guardianship and adoption, and, if appropriate, what preferences, if any, the parent or parents have as to the permanency goal.” *Id.*

§ 2-28(2.3)(C)(i)-(v).

¶ 23 Ordinarily, we would review a trial court’s dispositional ruling under the manifest-weight-of-the-evidence standard. *In re J.W.*, 386 Ill. App. 3d 847, 856 (2008). In this case, the dispositional order is not being challenged. However, the permanency goal directly follows dispositional proceedings, which utilize the manifest-weight-of-the-evidence standard. Therefore, we will not reverse the permanency goal findings unless they are against the manifest weight of the evidence. A finding is against the manifest weight of the evidence when the opposite result is clearly evident. *In re Audrey B.*, 2015 IL App (1st) 142909, ¶ 32.

¶ 24 The bulk of respondent's contentions on appeal focus on her history as the minors' caretaker, her ultimate cooperation with DCFS by signing required documents and completing requested services, and her description of agency criticism as communication difficulties. First, it is clear the trial court found respondent's testimony was not credible regarding her contention of a lack of communication between her and the caseworker. We afford great deference to a court's best-interest findings because it sits in a superior position to observe the witnesses, judge credibility, and assess the evidence. *In re C.P.*, 2019 IL App (4th) 190420, ¶ 71. The court commented specifically on the difficulty of keeping respondent on task and focused on a single subject.

¶ 25 Second, we find going through the motions of completing required documents and services is not the benchmark of successful parenting. For instance, the completion of court-ordered services alone may not be sufficient to demonstrate reasonable progress. See *In re R.L.*, 352 Ill. App. 3d 985, 999 (2004). Rather a respondent must demonstrate an ability "to implement the skills taught." *Id.* In this case, it was not the destination of completing court-ordered tasks, but the journey where respondent repeatedly slowed progress for the minors. She routinely demonstrated guarded and skeptical behavior of the very agency tasked with improving her ability to parent the minors. Moreover, the caseworker noted respondent had failed to implement the skills she was taught through parenting courses.

¶ 26 Lastly, respondent's willingness to step in and care for the minors since they were five years old despite having no familial relationship to them is nothing short of laudable. However, the minors at the time of the hearing were 12 years old, and their needs had considerably changed. The record reveals respondent continually exacerbated the behavioral problems the minors were experiencing. Despite respondent's noble desire to step in and care for the minors,

the relevant consideration in this case was the health, safety, and best interests of the minors. The emphasis must remain on their needs now and going forward. Therefore, based on the record before us, we cannot say the opposite result is clearly evident. Thus, the trial court's decision to change the permanency goal to guardianship and remove respondent as guardian of the minors was not against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 27

### III. CONCLUSION

¶ 28

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

¶ 29

Affirmed.