

FOSTER CARE

Dream comes full circle

Dec 12 '14 Tribune

It is unusual that a significant event in your first career comes round full circle as a significant event in your second career, but that happened to me.

In my first career as a school psychologist with Des Moines Schools, I had the opportunity to meet and work with Reggie Kelsey, the Reggie of "Reggie's Sleep-out."

I evaluated Reggie on his 18th birthday, the day he could legally sign for himself, the day he aged out of foster care. It was clear Reggie was in no way ready to fend for himself in the world.

Our support team moved heaven and earth to access and secure immediate services for him to no avail. Not in time for Reggie because within a few months, his body was found floating in the Des Moines River. Reggie had died.

I attended Reggie's memorial service at the Youth Shelter in Johnston, which was the last place he lived before the streets.

Many people attended and when time came to speak about Reggie, I walked to the front, my heart pounding, but I had to speak.

I apologized to Reggie for all the ways the systems in his life had failed him, including the one I represented.

My statement was a promise to do all I could within my system, the public schools, to prevent this from happening again.

There were other system representatives present that day

REV. DEB HILL-DAVIS

Guest Column

who also felt the deep pang of "system failure."

In time, George Belitsos and Youth & Shelter Services Inc. of Ames had responded to this need. Legislation was also passed to change the foster care system.

From the tragedy of Reggie evolved the AMP Program — Achieving Maximum Potential, a program specifically designed to serve youth aging out of foster care.

Fast forward to 2014 and I am 2+ years into my second career as a minister at Unity Church of Ames. Our church is hosting the Interfaith Martin Luther King Jr. Service in 2015.

In light of events in Ferguson, Mo., I feel a pull to do something more lasting than hosting a memorial service.

I grew up in the St. Louis area. The terrible events there tugged at my heart. What to do? And then it came: a Dream Seed Scholarship from funds that we would collect as a Love Offering the day of the MLK Service on Jan. 18, 2015. Who would be the recipient?

Unity Church has connections to YSS as we had been giving Christmas stockings to the youth at Rosedale Shelter who are unable to go home for Christmas.

I attended an orientation at Youth and Shelter Services Inc. in November and met Teri Bailey and Ruth Buckels, the coordinator of the AMP program. I had found our recipient!

Finally, it was possible to give back and pay it forward at the same time.

Our Dream Seed Scholarship grants will fund the dreams of young people aging out of foster care. The "throwaway kids" will know we care about them; we care enough to invest in their dream.

The AMP leaders will develop the platform/process whereby the kids apply for the scholarship/grants.

My dream is that this is the beginning. My dream is that every year the hosting church of the Interfaith Martin Luther King Jr. Service collects for the Dream Seed Scholarship.

My dream is that at the 2016 MLK Service, the youth who received the 2015 Dream Seed will tell the story of realizing their dream.

Who knows what may come of investing in the Dream Seed?

My faith says it is a seed worth planting and I believe in keeping promises.

If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution, make checks payable to YSS/AMP and put Dream Seed on the memo line and mail to Unity Church of Ames, 226 Ninth St., Ames, IA, 50010.

REV. DEB HILL-DAVIS, Unity Church of Ames