

Monthly Excerpt | March 2020

“My eyes become glassy with tears.”

A couple hours later, I arrive at my daughter's house. She already knows my sad story, after many days on the phone with her. I needed a listening ear to get through this sad period in my life. After being open for just three years, Aunt Hattie's Place (AHP), a new third “eco-friendly” group home in Sandy Spring, Maryland, along with numerous other group homes in the state, is being reduced, sparked by a statewide initiative called Place Matters. The initiative was designed to keep children in families first and decrease the numbers of children in congregate care (www.dhr.state.md.us). Subsequently, this lack of state funding necessitated having to sell the boys group home and my personal home to pay off the construction loan.

My daughter puts her hand on my shoulder as she consoles and encourages me. I tell her like I've told others, I'm disappointed, but I'm also honored and feel blessed to have been able to help so many troubled teens from becoming another saddened statistic, especially black males. The reason I care so much for black males is that even long after the civil rights marches of the sixties and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s I Have A Dream speech, people of color continue to be disproportionately incarcerated, policed, and sentenced to death at significantly higher rates than their white counterparts. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, one in three black men can expect to go to prison in their lifetime. Very troubling and dismal statistics, indeed, and they don't appear to be getting any better.

Anxious to make a difference in the community and the world, I founded my first group home for foster boys, Aunt Hattie's Place (AHP), in 1997. The boys, who were abused, neglected and/or abandoned, were overjoyed to stay at Aunt Hattie's Place. While at AHP, they were able to attend public or private schools, eat three home-cooked meals a day and stay in a clean, clutter-free environment. AHP's staff implemented rules and offered guidance and structure that were very different from the surroundings the boys had left.

Although the recently built Aunt Hattie's Place group home for boys in Sandy Spring is closed, I remain grateful to have another residential group home for foster boys in Baltimore City. Having the opportunity to mentor young people, has allowed me to move forward on my never-ending journey of making a difference and helping people just like others helped me.

Meanwhile, my granddaughter, Reagan, (our budding artist in the family) is listening quietly to the entire conversation and drawing a picture as she frequently does. After finishing, she presents me with the picture that she drew. It captured everything I had said to her mom, along with her special embellishments.

My eyes become glassy with tears. The drawing has me looking out of the airplane at the clouds below with a large rainbow encircling the plane. At each end of the rainbow, she has penned the word “God.” She explains that God is taking care of me, because she constantly prays for me and my foster boys every night. I am too touched and too full to respond. I give her the biggest hug and compliment her on capturing the essence of our entire conversation so well and exactly the way grandma feels.