

Celebrating With our Youth: A Memorable Event

Janine LeGal

In early June, I was invited by the General Child and Family Services Authority to attend a very special event at Pure, a Winnipeg Night Club notably located near Confusion Corner. I was to be an observer and put aside the 'reporter' me, at least this time around. No questions, no interviews, no note taking. Just listen and observe. I had no idea what to expect but I did think this was going to be an easy gig. It turned out not to be.

Child and Family Services' Age of Majority ceremonies are held a few times a year to honour and celebrate youth who have been in care and are turning 18. This particular evening there was a fairly packed house. The room was beautifully decorated with colourful balloons and streamers. The tables were covered with sparkles and candies. There was plenty of food, with such perennial favourites, for most young people, as pizza and pasta, garlic breads, soft drinks, and sweet decadent birthday cake for dessert.

Those in attendance had taken extra care to look their best, young and old alike; everyone was looking like they had good reason to celebrate. And they did.

Contributing to the festive ambiance was a high-energy emcee, who herself had been a child in care; and entertainment in the form of singers, a hip hop act, and a talk by another former child in care who now gives presentations on his experiences to inspire others. And then there were presentations to all birthday guys and gals with goody gift bags and a

few words from family members, friends and/or Child and Family Services staff.

That's where the gig started to get tough for me. When the young people started to share some of their stories alongside their foster parents and siblings, things started to get really real, hitting close to my heart, and I struggled to find Kleenex. That was the one thing that would have been a nice finishing touch for each table.

I heard stories of challenges at various life stages, about growing up in foster care, learning, overcoming, surviving, and yes, even thriving. That's when I really needed the Kleenex. Standing before me was the courage it takes to get through childhood and adolescence when you feel different than other kids. I saw foster parents who gave everything they could for their children. I saw pride, admiration and honesty about dealing with difficult situations. I saw shyness, awkwardness, appreciation, strength, and gratitude. I saw people who cared deeply for each other. I saw dedicated, committed and caring Child and Family Services staff. I saw compassion and lots of it. I saw laughter and tears.



The hardest part for me was not talking to the people and getting to know a little more about their stories. As a journalist I want to know. I am curious. I ask people questions in order to connect with and affirm their powerful stories. There will be a next time.

But for now, suffice it to say that the Age of Majority event marks a very important time in the lives of the young people who have come a long way in a world that hasn't always been easy or kind for them. The efforts by Child and Family Services staff to make this a special evening for the young people and for their family and friends will be remembered and cherished by all who were in attendance.

