**Making Valentine’s Day Sweet for Youth in Foster Care**

***By Judge Margaret Pickard***

Many youth in foster care have never had Valentine’s Day cards to share with classmates and friends on Valentine’s Day. This can be an embarrassing experience and lead to additional stress and trauma for a child during the Valentine’s season. CASA volunteers have a unique opportunity to guide youth in care to experience holidays through a new lens of love, support, and encouragement.

Schools often provide supplies for younger children to make ONE Valentine’s Day card for a parent, but youth in care often have multiple people who have helped in caring for them and they don’t want to choose just ONE person to give their special handmade card to. Foster youth may still have one or both biological parents involved, siblings who they visits with, grandparents/aunts/uncles/cousins who have been more involved in caretaking than the parents, and the members of the foster family, some or all of whom a youth would like to give a special Valentine’s Day card to. It is interesting to think that a simple Valentine’s Day card can create so many loyalty conflicts for a child, but children in foster care often have to face these types of all or nothing choices and this can lead to short-term and long-term loyalty conflicts for them. However, the good news is that CASA volunteers are the perfect support person to help a youth avoid these conflicts!

After the New Year, CASA volunteers have a wonderful opportunity to check in with their youth to ensure that they have Valentine’s Day cards to share, or at least supplies to make fun cards for family and friends. While many placements provide store bought cards for youth to share at school and with their family of origin, some do not, so a quick call can make all the difference in the world for a child. This also provides the opportunity for a CASA volunteer to have a discussion about Valentine’s Day, the history and meaning, and opens the door to asking a youth about their favorite Valentine’s Day memory. If they don’t have a favorite memory, this is chance to help them create one this year … or maybe a youth will share that they have someone special that they want to give a Valentine’s Day card to – opening the door for a whole new conversation.

To get the conversation started, here’s a little history of Valentine’s Day to share with your youth:

Valentine’s Day is also called Saint Valentine’s Day, or the Feast of Saint Valentine. It has dark origins, so it is surprising that it now evokes feelings of love and affection. Folklore has it that the holiday originated with the martyrdom of two men named Valentine or Valentinus, a common name of the time. However, the romantic origins of Valentine’s Day began in the year 269 A.D., when a Roman priest named Valentinus was jailed and pending execution. According to legend, one of his last acts before he died was writing a love letter to a woman who visited him in prison, signing the letter “From Your Valentine.” The Catholic Church, Pope Gelasius, memorialized the day he died, February 14th, by declaring the day as St. Valentine’s Day.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It’s important to remember that Valentine’s Day’s is not just a special day for sweethearts. It’s also an opportunity for all of us to spread love and friendship within our communities. Many of us get a “warm and fuzzy feeling” when we see a Valentine wreath on a door, Valentine’s Day decorations scattered throughout the house, or receive a Valentine’s Day card from someone close to us. The scientific term for feeling “warm and fuzzy,” nostalgia, or similar positive feelings is “Kama Muta,” a scientific term borrowed from the ancient Sanskrit, meaning “moved by love.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

It is my hope that all youth in care will have Kama Muta during this upcoming Valentine’s season, and that we will all take the time to let our youth, our family, our friends, and our neighbors know that someone is thinking of them and they are not forgotten.

1. See <https://www.bhg.com/holidays/valentines-day/cards/history-of-valentines-day/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See https://www.socialsciencespace.com/2020/01/that-warm-fuzzy-feeling-has-a-name-kama-muta. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)