



The Beauty of Simple Interactions



By Susan Damico, M.A.

Within a timespan of two weeks, I participated in three very educational, inspirational and sobering professional development events. The first occurred in Washington, D.C., at [Mayor Muriel Bowser's National Maternal & Infant Health Summit](#). My colleague, Nefertiti Poyner, was invited to speak along with a very prestigious group that put a laser focus on the unacceptably poor maternal health outcomes for Black women in the United States. The personal stories of loss were heartbreaking, and the statistics surrounding maternal health for Black women were eye-opening. I encourage you to learn more by visiting their website: dcmaternalhealth.com.

The second event I attended was the Young Children Experiencing Homelessness Summit. This summit focused on the [Building Early Links for Learning \(BELL\)](#) Project, a Philadelphia-based initiative designed to break down the silos that disconnect professionals working within early childcare and education and housing. Listening to experts speak about how to break down barriers that plague families experiencing homelessness was inspiring...

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... while hearing the personal stories was difficult to process.

Lastly, I took advantage of a free screening of [Paper Tigers](#), a documentary that chronicles the lives of several high school students at Lincoln Alternative High School in Walla Walla, Washington. Learning more about the trauma-informed framework that turned this school around, and listening to the principal and the teachers talk about their love for these children and their dedication to their work was, again, inspiring. The statistics on improved graduation rates, improved grades and student well-being helped to reaffirm the fact that children can heal from trauma and that the unconditional love and support of a safe, caring adult is the most important protective factor. At the same time, watching and learning about these students' lives was painful. Every single child had experienced parental mental illness, drug addiction, homelessness, sexual assault and/or abandonment.

Participating in these three powerful learning opportunities in a very short time frame has taken a toll on me. I know that the societal problems of health inequity, homelessness, mental illness, sexual assault and child abuse exist, but I do not grapple with them all on a daily basis. All three of the events I took part in emphasized solutions and progress, but whereas as I can typically stay focused on resilience, strengths and protective factor building, I found myself overwhelmed by the big picture challenges. I was feeling powerless. While I suppose this feeling can serve an important purpose, perhaps to ignite renewed passion to create social change, I felt relief this morning when I remembered what one of the participants at the Young Children Experiencing Homelessness Summit shared. She encouraged us to learn more about [Simple Interactions](#). For those of you that are not familiar with Simple Interactions (SI), I encourage you, the way she encouraged me, to learn more. The mission of SI is simple: To encourage, enrich and empower human interactions around children and their helpers.

When I set thirty minutes aside to learn more about SI, I was reminded about the importance of relationships and the power that every single ordinary interaction we have on a daily basis (with adults and children, both personal and professional) can have on a person's life. The SI website is rich with information that will speak to you, inspire you and remind you that we are not powerless, but powerful in our ability to change lives. This specific article on SI truly spoke to me:

http://www.incubator143.org/uploads/2/9/0/1/29014757/grow_simple_interactions_2017.pdf

