

“Where you go, I go.”

When used effectively, respite makes children a priority.

by Mike Pochowski, foster parent

As a foster parent, I've listened to many stories from children who have called my house "home" over the years. The children talk about belonging. They talk about hope. They talk about family. What I've learned from their words is that we, as temporary caregivers, need to decide whether we positively impact their lives or not.

When we become foster parents, we make a commitment of quality parenting to Clark County's children to bridge gaps in their families as they work toward reunification or another permanency goal. In turn, our community's most vulnerable population becomes part of our own families.

As we enter the holiday season, I implore you to bring your foster children with you on vacation. Seek whatever help you can from the Department, which is as equally committed to providing quality care, to make travel a reality for these children who desperately need us. Included here is a message from the children I've cared for that I've clearly heard. Using respite when we travel is not in the best interest of the children and youth we serve.

Respite is a tool that, when used effectively, can make children a priority while caregivers deal with health issues or other emergencies. The message we don't want children to get is that "we need a break from you."

Parenting is tough and brings with it many challenges whether you're caring for biological or foster children. But we have the power to make a difference.

Here is a story that I hope resonates with all of my foster parenting peers, as told through the voices of many foster children.

Where You Go, I Go

I once had a dream that I belonged to a family that really cared for me. They even considered me part of the family.

It's now vacation time, when families travel to visit relatives, friends who live out of state or maybe even go to an amusement park (I love riding rollercoasters).

I get to go this year. It is so good knowing that I'm treated like a "normal" kid, as much as I can be, at least.

But it wasn't always like that.

In my previous home, I had to pack my stuff and was dropped off at another house, or even worse, Child Haven. I was scared. I felt like I had done something terribly wrong.

No one ever explained what I had done to cause this to happen.

The new family treated me alright, so I guess they were never told what the terrible thing was that I had done. I kept to myself and tried to behave as best I could. The two weeks dragged on.

If you wonder why we cry when you walk out the door or leave us with strangers, maybe this will make a little more sense. You have become family. Now you know why it's so important to be treated with "normalcy" and that where you go, I go.



Mike and Mary Ann Pochowski have fostered children in three states since 1977. They currently reside in Clark County.