



[Home](#) > [Blogs](#) > [The Boldness of Love](#) > [The Importance of Being](#)



THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING

Posted by [Catherine Koverola](#) on October 28, 2014

Last week, I paid a visit to Boston Youth Sanctuary (BYS) with some of my Lesley colleagues. Boston Youth Sanctuary is an agency that serves some of the most vulnerable, but resilient youth in the area. I never tire of visiting BYB. I'm always so impressed by the comprehensive and intuitive approach to the wraparound services offered by the center. Spending time with Founder and Executive Director Jana Karp and her staff is always inspirational because of the deeply thoughtful and intentional approach to caring for the children they serve. The care is manifest in a multitude of ways.

The staff at BYB provides a consistent physically and emotionally safe place, wherein they endeavor to meet the basic needs of each individual child. Services include the full range of expressive art therapies--art, music, dance and drama -- as well as mindfulness practices and individual and group therapy. The children receive tutoring and homework help, there are laundry services on hand to ensure that each child has a clean school uniform and a change of clothes. Staff ensure that the kids learn basic self-care skills, such as "survival cooking," in which the youngsters are taught how to eat nutritiously using the kinds of food they have available in their homes. It's all wonderfully practical. One of my favorite examples of Survival Cooking is the sushi-making lesson. The children are shown how to improvise with a piece of bread, cutting off the crusts, rolling it flat, putting a spoonful of tuna in the middle, a few slices of a vegetable and rolling it up. To bolster their nutrition the children receive a daily dinner of organic, non-processed foods, accompanied by as much fruit as they'd like. Perhaps most importantly, Boston Youth Sanctuary provides support and advocacy for the guardians and families of the children as they navigate the complex and bureaucratic systems in which they often find themselves.

What I am consistently impressed by at Boston Youth Sanctuary is the way in which staff members are truly present for each child, moment by moment. During story time I see two little youngsters enfolded in Estevon's broad arms, listening in rapt attention as he reads them a story; they are safe, secure, and learning from a positive role model. In the gym, pre-adolescents are working off steam during hip-hop dance class, taught by a dancer hailing from the local community. The young man attends in great detail to each child's steps and movements. He is present with each child as they move through each moment. In another room, a young girl is struggling with transitions and verging on a meltdown; the skillful care of staff member helps her contain and process the big feelings that threaten to overwhelm her. Val, a therapist on staff, explains to us her use of mindfulness practice with the children. She shares a recent example, in which the children spent a full thirty



[Home](#) > [Blogs](#) > [The Boldness of Love](#) > [The Importance of Being](#)

minutes exploring all aspects of a frozen orange. The children are taught to “be present” with the orange as they experience the feel, the smell, the taste, and the look of the frozen fruit.

Another unique element that allows the children to be present is the program’s “unplugged” policy. Upon entry each afternoon, the children relinquish their phones, tablets, and computers. Their full attention is directed at whatever activity, group, or interaction they engage in while on the Boston Youth Sanctuary grounds, and they are free from the stresses and demands that constant technological stimulation can bring.

After bearing witness to the incredible work happening at Boston Youth Sanctuary, my colleagues and I begin an animated conversation with Jana about how to design an effective program evaluation for the center. It is, after all, a relatively young program at only three years, and its structure and offerings are unparalleled in the Greater Boston Area (and likely beyond). The evidence-based scientist in me knows there is a practical way to do this, but deep in my heart I know that it’s really all about the dedicated staff and their commitment to being fully present with these children. That loving human presence that each child experiences with the staff at Boston Youth Sanctuary is, I am quite convinced, the vital component of this program’s success.

What implications does a program like Boston Youth Sanctuary have for those of us who don’t work directly with vulnerable children? What’s the lesson here? It seems to me that we can all devote a little more time and energy into being present. How present are you with those in your life: with co-workers, friends and family members? How distracted are you with your own worries or the latest text, tweet, or email? What would happen if you “unplugged” for an afternoon?

Posted in: [Mindfulness](#), [Leadership](#)

Source: <http://www.lesley.edu/blog/boldness-of-love/2014/10/the-importance-of-being/>