

“EVERYBODY’S RESPONSIBILITY, NOBODY’S CHILD”

Rose’s Story



At 28 years of age, Rose is the youngest of the women I had the privilege of interviewing for purposes of this project. She has a lot to say and instills a great deal of trust. Trust in her ability to get the job done and to do it with purpose. Traits worth possessing for a woman raising five children, all age 8 and under, on her own.

That trust stems, in great part, from the fact that Rose is someone who began cultivating a close relationship with responsibility, for herself *and* for others, when she was just 8 years and her brother was a mere 10 months old. These were the children’s ages when their mother died. From that day on, Rose feels she became “everyone’s responsibility, but nobody’s child,” as the duties associated with her care and the care of her brother were shared, somewhat begrudgingly, among relatives in the extended family. In addition, many family members, inclusive of Rose, shared a heightened sense of sympathy for the fate of the 10-month-old boy who would never get to know his mom. In fact, Rose claims she’s been a mother ever since, as she quickly assumed the role of her infant brother’s biggest advocate. As a youngster, the magnitude of her own loss was consumed in her sense of duty.

It is that strong sense of duty that motivates Rose to see her role as a parent as her “number one priority”. *“I try to be totally involved with my kids’ school as much as possible. I live my life around doing things that I feel my children would be proud of.”* It seems as though she’s succeeded. Before Rose started having children of her own, her firm sense of commitment led her to the United States Marine Corps where she met her husband and served as a mechanic repairing the armed forces’ all-terrain vehicle, the Humvee. Somehow I have no trouble picturing this compact woman, whose hands move almost as quickly as the information highway linking her thoughts with her steady stream of speech, taking apart and successfully putting back together this vehicle embodying the proportions of a small tank. *“My kids are proud of what I’ve done. In fact, I told them if anyone says ‘your mom wears combat boots,’ ‘just tell them ‘yeah, and she still has them in her closet, too.’”* It’s nice to see the laughter and pride issuing forth from someone whose very playfulness seems rooted in purpose. *“When my kids can see me acting silly, it increases their imagination and playfulness.”*

Rose’s ties with Early Connections led to further involvement with the Parent Empowerment Group, or PEG. Here she saw fellow participants who brought up concerns that Rose perceived as far more burdensome than her own. Participants who, nonetheless, demonstrated the ability to discuss and share them with others. She also discovered the value in her own parenting style, which she describes as a democracy. *“I want my kids to have choices, but know that there are rules and consequences, too. I don’t believe in spanking, but if I have to, I explain why. That leaves me in charge but gives them some strength and sense of control.”*

Rose is proud of her expertise and competence gained through life experience and has begun to see her own impact on others. *“Sometimes my thoughts blow people away. They wouldn’t expect that from me.”* I expect that Rose could do pretty much anything she sets her mind to. And lately that includes the dream to eventually return to school to become an Emergency Medical Technician (or EMT) and work in an ambulance. *“I want to make a difference in other people’s lives. I’d like to know my work touched them.”* In the meantime, she’s making a big impact on the lives of her children. *“I realized how neglected I felt as a child, and I thought, ‘Now, why would I do that to my children?’”* It sounds so pragmatic when she says it. I can’t help but consider how different it was for Rose than it is for her own kids. It’s funny how different people, even within the same family, take similar circumstances, and create such dramatically different results.

When I asked Rose if she had any recommendations for others considering Early Connections or the Parent Empowerment Group she replied, *“Just do it - go for it - don’t be ashamed of where you are. Don’t be afraid to open up. No one’s there to judge you.”*

It may very well be that having the opportunity to exercise her imagination with others her own age could be the greatest gift Rose gained through her ties with the Alliance Early Connections Component. *“Structure can be limiting. Early Connections helped me to get out of the house and the kindness of the Alliance staff helped me to open up. I got to have adult conversations. Just because I’ve got five kids doesn’t mean I should be left off by myself. I want people to know that I’m not ‘just a mother.’ My kids see the change in me. If I had not started opening up with the Alliance staff member, I would probably still be keeping my distance—because I thought the further away I would get away from people, the better off I’d be. They’d have less opportunity to take advantage of me.”*



Rose