

By Joyce A. Fourth

Valentine's Day, a day when our hearts, minds and souls turn to love. When sweethearts become engaged and married couples continue to pledge their love for one another with tokens large and small. It also is a time when school-children exchange homemade or store-bought Valentine cards and conversation hearts. When you profess your love for another person, if it is more than just lip service; you are making a commitment. The D.C. government, as well as every resident of this city, could start today to profess its love for all young people of this city. We should not only say it, we should show it.

The city must focus on what's right with teens and not what's wrong, and give all teens the opportunity to live in a city that's safe, a city where they can get the health care they need, and a city where they can achieve excellence in school. In other words, make the city responsive to their needs. Show some love.

To do right by D.C. teens does not require a degree in rocket science, but it does require love. Adults in this city need to get in the mindset that what they want for their own teens, they should want for all teens. Even teens need to feel that they are safe when going to and from school or just walking down the street. They need to know that churches, recreation centers and their homes are safe havens, where they can interact with their peers without fear of being placed in harm's way. Adults need to show some love.

Adults in this city should pay close attention to the lyrics from a popular song that says, "Another day goes by

A Valentine for D.C.

It's time to show our children what love really means

and still the children cry, put a little love in your heart." Why is it so difficult for this city government to put "children first," as stated on the D.C. Public Schools' Web site. The only time children, including adolescent children, are first is when they can be used to further political agendas or win elections. It is almost a cliché to say that "children are our future." But if we want to lift the concept from cliché to reality, there are things we, as adults, must commit to do. We must make sure that the transition from their teen years to adult years is as smooth as possible. We have to provide opportunities and support, not only for the children in our own families, but also for teens who have no families to stand by them, or whose families are having a tough time of it.

The teens in the District are not only our future, but also our present, and their needs must be met now. They need love now; they need an education now; they need shelter now; they need support and guidance now; whatever they need, they need it now so that they will have a future.

In spite of all the ugliness (dilapidated schools, without heat in the winter and air conditioning in the summer, raggedy neighborhoods, poor or no health care, teen pregnancy, unkempt playgrounds, child sexual abuse, poor or substandard housing, and substance abuse) hurled at young

people, they still have hopes and dreams — dreams that may be deferred because of their surroundings, but dreams nevertheless. The D.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy hears about the goals young people have for the future because we listen to them in teen town hall meetings, youth task force meetings and focus groups. Adults need to show some love.

It is incumbent upon all of us, including those who have successfully gotten ourselves and our children through adolescence, to focus our en-

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ergies on creating a community that gives all young people in the District of Columbia the support, encouragement, values, opportunities and resources they need to navigate the stormy years between 10 and 20.

Until adults in this city become serious about seeing teens as assets instead of deficits, it will be business as usual. Adults need to step up to the

plate and take on the responsibility of being an adult.

That means making sure that all teens get the health care they need — including back-to-school check-ups — from immunizations to dental hygiene to mental-health care. And that also means meeting the needs of parents so that they can help their own teens. Then and only then will the District's children begin to be our future.

So on this Valentine's Day 2003, let's hope the D.C. government is shot by cupid's arrow, allowing it to show the children the true meaning of St. Valen-

tine's Day and not the meaning of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. Because when you get down to it, it's all about love.

Show your love.

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