

Good intentions aren't enough

I recently shared an article on social media in which a #BlackLivesMatter activist outlined feelings of discomfort with white allies, particularly at protests and related actions. Despite often good — sometimes confused — intentions, the author argued, white involvement can be problematic.

Sometimes white anarchists show up and shift attention and activities toward what they have identified as just targets. More

often, and more personally for the author, whiteness itself is a reminder of the brutality of the white supremacy to which #BlackLivesMatter ultimately is responding.

I shared the piece because I believe that being supportive to a movement requires listening. Listening can be uncomfortable, but it's beneficial to understanding how to be most helpful. Much of the piece resonated, from having seen white protesters be condescending with suggestions, be eager to receive attention and to expect some degree of affirmation for their participation.

I don't support #BlackLivesMatter because I want affirmation or because I want to "help" people. I do so because the movement is, at present, one of the most active and engaged recognitions of the lasting negative experiences faced by people of color in this country.

The real power I have is to challenge the systems in which I am comfortable, from which I benefit disproportionately — and to do it because it is my moral obligation without the expectation of getting high-fived

Confronted with responses like this in the past I have felt uncomfortable, but that discomfort pales in comparison to the discomfort of the author. Feeling uncomfortable when realizing that the things I once accepted as truths might be built on shaky ground — that the Civil Rights Movement is behind us, that Martin Luther King Jr. was the sole voice of that movement, that all we need to do is to join hands and give peace a chance — is, for white people, a temporary inconvenience and one that passes. It is not perpetual structural and psychological warfare. It is not seeing family and friends get killed by police with no authority. It is not seeing the nation come together for tragedies involving law enforcement but not for people who look like me and live experiences similar to mine while many write off my anger, sadness, rage and lower life expectancy by going out of their way to remind me that, actually, #AllLivesMatter.

I know that every good intention in the world does not stop my presence from triggering a reminder that the same systems that disproportionately set me up for success — or at least do not actively try to wrest opportunity from me — do not extend to all.

That is outside of my power, but at the very least I can know and acknowledge it and offer my support in a context that is most useful. Showing up at a rally is the bare minimum of human response and support I can offer. I don't expect to be celebrated for it. The real power I have is to challenge the systems in which I am comfortable, from which I benefit disproportionately — and to do it because it is my moral obligation without the expectation of getting high-fived.

It was not surprising to encounter some white objections to the piece I shared. Some wrote it off as racist; others suggested it's hard to believe Martin Luther King Jr. writing such a thing. Such responses reinforce the author's proclaimed discomfort.

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ALEX STEED

You're not alone



Taking care of your grandchild? Here are 8 resources to help.



GEORGE DANBY

BY JENNIFER CRITTENDEN AND LISA SCOFIELD
SPECIAL TO THE BDN

The BDN recently featured a story about a grandmother, Wendy, who found herself caring for her grandchild in retirement as her son and his partner struggled with addiction. Wendy is not alone.

Her family is joined by nearly 17,000 such families in our state and 8 million nationwide who are headed up by a relative caregiver, a grandparent, aunt or uncle who is caring for a child.

Grandfamilies, families where a relative has stepped in to care for a child, are increasingly common, a response to the widespread impact of substance abuse, incarceration and mental illness in our country. Such caregivers come from all walks of life but have one thing in common: a desire to support their relative children and keep them safe.

To be sure, kinship caregiving is complex and requires caregivers to become experts in education, child care, mental health services, medical care and more — all while navigating and maintaining complicated and, at times, delicate family relationships.

Many caregivers struggle with depression, anxiety and even guilt about the circumstances that have led to their caregiving. If you are a relative who has stepped in to care for a child, you are not alone.

Here are some local resources and information that can support you in your caregiving journey.

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine: Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine is a key resource for kinship families. AFFM provides support groups, training and education, mentorship, one-on-one assistance, clothing and household items, and much more. They have offices in Orono and Saco and can be reached at 1-800-833-9786. A list of support groups is available on their website, affm.net. AFFM have specially trained staff who can provide personalized assistance.

Families And Children Together: F.A.C.T. has developed a resource guide for grandfamilies. It can be accessed online or by calling 941-2347.

AAA Caregiver Support Program: As a caregiver, it is important that you get the support you need so you can provide the best care possible to your relative child. If you are over the age of 60 or have a disability, the local Area Agency on Aging can provide assistance to you as a caregiver through its Caregiver Support Program. If you live in the eastern Maine area, the Eastern Area Agency on Aging has a local program that can help caregivers like you find additional support. To contact the Caregiver Support Program, call Eastern Area Agency on Aging at 800-432-7812 or visit their website at eaaa.org.

Legal help: Grandfamilies often face legal hurdles in caring for their children. If you find yourself in need of low-cost legal assistance, there are options available locally. First, if you are over the age of 60, Legal Services for the Elderly can provide you with a consultation. Their legal helpline number is 800-750-5353. Pine Tree Legal has a helpful online resource on guardianship. The organization also has an interactive online tool that will walk you through a set of questions and direct to you to information and assistance based on your legal needs.

They may also be able to provide you with low-cost legal assistance for your family. Pine Tree Legal's Bangor office number is 207-942-8241.

If you don't quite know where to start, there is a great legal guide for grandfamilies with helpful tips and resources that has been developed by Families And Children Together. That guide can be accessed online or by calling F.A.C.T. at 207-941-2347.

Accessing MaineCare and TANF: Raising a child comes with new expenses and financial burdens. Programs such as MaineCare and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families may be able to ease the burden of these additional household expenses. Many caregivers are not aware that they can obtain MaineCare and TANF support for the child in care even if they themselves do not qualify for such assistance.

For additional assistance in obtaining benefits and more information about the process, contact Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine at 800-833-9786 or directly contact the MaineCare offices at 800-977-6740 or TANF at 207-624-4168. If the child's parent is receiving a TANF benefit, See Families, Page D3

Police chief challenges protesters: 'We're hiring'

"We're hiring." With just two words, Dallas Police Chief David Brown offered protesters the most concrete solution to their complaints. Time will tell if anyone takes him up on it. At first blush, it doesn't seem likely.

Rather than, to crib from a quote attributed to Gandhi, "being the change you want to see," one Black Lives Matter activist called for the abolition of law enforcement. When asked how public order will be kept without men and women in blue, the response was the development of "community solutions for transformative justice."

Such a call is a high-minded concept that has little application to reality. We have people of all colors dealing drugs in Maine, shooting at each other in Augusta parking lots and massacring Americans in San Bernardino, Orlando and Dallas. To respond to these acts, we need good, dedicated officers to step forward and into harm's way. Officers like Chief Brown.

His personal story is remarkable. In the early 1990s, he had to bury his younger brother who had been shot by drug dealers. In 2010, he buried his son, David Jr. Why? He was killed in a police shootout. Unfortunately, David Jr. had murdered two individuals — one a police officer — while under the influence of drugs.

Chief Brown's perseverance through these personal tragedies and poise under the pressure of the national spotlight should be an example for many. That holds true regardless of whether or not you agree with him on the use of explosives to eliminate the sniper, concerns about open carry laws or posting police firings on Facebook.

At a time when a lot of anger is being directed at law enforcement, he reflects the best of his profession. And, as his reform agenda demonstrates, he understands some of the underlying reason for the reaction against law enforcement. The shootings of Philando Castile in Minnesota and Alton Sterling in Louisiana represent this well.

For example, Castile's driving record — he was pulled over more than three times per year on average since 2002 with most charges dismissed — would likely have raised an eyebrow for the chief; not about Castile, but rather the force. He has made it a priority to reduce traffic stops in Dallas.

When it comes to the use of force, he significantly increased training and oversight, resulting in a significant decrease in police shootings. And he made changes to improve the investigation process to ensure the correct answer was reached on whether such force was justified. If it wasn't, he held officers accountable. If it was, he said so without hesitation.

We will see if America follows his example once the investigations are complete and the entire stories known. If police over-escalated two situations — one involving an individual with a permit to carry — then the officers should be held accountable. If there are extenuating details not seen in the videos making each a lawful use of force, then protestors should acknowledge they may have been mistaken.

But even if they are mistaken about these two particular instances, the arguments of Black Lives Matter are not misplaced. They may focus on shootings, but concerns about a criminal justice system run amok permeate society.

You hear it when people correctly point out the high incarceration rates of black men, the injustice of mandatory minimum sentences, or complaints about trumped up charges from an over-reaching regulatory morass. Those same concerns are what led to the Oregon Militia occupation of federal property in January, a protest of a different sort.

Whether the Hammonds — the ranchers the Oregon Militia rallied to support — were angels or devils does not matter. The fact is they were charged with laws de-



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