

When you hear the term “Reproductive Justice,” what comes to mind?

by Amy Johnson

National Coordinator for Our Whole Lives

My hope is that this phrase creates a beautiful vision in your mind of a world where not only are all children wanted, but one where their parents are generously cared for during a pregnancy, and where their families are lovingly cared for after a child is born. Imagine a world full of families of all sizes and configurations who come together in many ways and have what they need—not only to survive—but also to be abundantly healthy and to thrive.

Too often, I find that people narrowly define “Reproductive Justice” and either avoid the topic or argue about it in unproductive ways. People get into heated religious and value-laden “either-or” quarrels and focus on making sure someone is “right” and someone is “wrong.” When we engage in these arguments, too often the only thing we succeed in is walking away from the discussion frustrated and righteously indignant. And when we are righteously indignant, we are prone to forget.

We can forget about fighting to fully fund superb comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education, so our children learn about how their amazing, beautiful bodies function, and about safe and consensual relationships and making magnificently healthy choices.

We can forget to fight for the rights of pregnant people to continue to work during a pregnancy in order to have independence and dignity and to feed, clothe, and house themselves and their families.

We can forget that extending the benefits of the Women, Infant and Children’s (WIC) nutritional program to children six years of age will feed millions of low-income children between the time they turn five and the time they start kindergarten and can receive free or reduced fee breakfasts and lunches at school.

We can forget that supporting high quality subsidized child care enables families to avoid choosing between the safety and education of their young child and simply having a place to live and food on the table.

We can forget that supporting better wages for educators and social workers serves us all. We can forget that when all children are safe, lovingly cared for and effectively educated, we create a better community, a better country, and a better world for everyone.

We need to remember that creating a world where these things exist is up to each and every one of us.

Instead of dismissing these ideas as “handouts,” we need to remember that every one of us who has attended public school, driven on a highway or interstate, called 911, checked a book out of a library, consumed clean drinking water, or been thankful for our freedom has already been the recipient of some sort of government program.

Instead of resorting to pointing fingers and divisive rhetoric, it is up to us to remember to raise our voices and to raise the level of the conversation about Reproductive Justice in our country. Reproductive Justice is not only about women and pregnancy. Reproductive Justice is about the ability to choose an abundantly healthy life for all families. And that serves us all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amy Johnson is National Coordinator for Our Whole Lives .

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