

RUBY McCLOUD

A Mother to Many



Looking back, Ruby McCloud can see how her life prepared her for her second career as a Professional Parent. That is Ruby's official title at Children's Aid and Family Services, where Ruby and her husband Ervin live with four teenagers in a family setting in an agency-owned group home.

"I thought I was done being a day-to-day parent," Ruby says with a smile. But eight years ago, Ruby's career in the field of finance took an interesting turn, as she saw a newspaper ad placed by Children's Aid and Family Services seeking Professional Parents. "I was looking for a new job in finance," she recalls. "I had been out of work for two years after having worked most of my life," she says. "The headline in the Children's Aid ad said, 'It's not just a job, it's a calling,' and it spoke to me. I felt like it might be an answer to a prayer."

Ruby explains that while she happily raised three birth children that she is very proud of, and also helped care for children of friends and family, she says becoming a foster parent and helping a child in need was something she always wanted to do.

Fast forward eight years. Ruby has cared for a total 48 teenage boys, many of whom, sadly, aren't used to a family environment, and all of whom have

"The strength of Mr. and Mrs. McCloud's teamwork in raising up those we serve lies in their ability to respect and care for one another. In most cases, this is the missing link in the lives of children in foster care. Our clients come from homes where they have witnessed their parents verbally and physical abuse one another. Mr. and Mrs. McCloud are role models, teaching our children the importance of respect, consistency and a strong marriage."

– Shanita Talton
Youth Development Specialist,
Children's Aid and Family Services

endured some type of trauma. She remembers her first Thanksgiving as a Professional Parent, and the young man who had always kept to himself. She tells us he and another boy got into a terrible fight during Thanksgiving dinner, but Ruby and Ervin managed to keep everyone calm. Afterward, she talked to the boy and learned his beloved grandmother had died on Thanksgiving, and the holiday was a trigger for his trauma. "He bared his soul to me that day," she says. "He's now 24 years



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old and he still comes back to visit me. He said he wished he would have listened to us more years ago, but he's doing well. He graduated college and has a good job."

Every boy who has lived with Ruby and Ervin and then moved on is never far from their thoughts. Many of the young men call and text Ruby on a regular basis, and four of them spend holidays with the McClouds. "We want the children to know that they will always be part of the family," Ruby says. "We usually have 20 -25 people at Thanksgiving, and some of the boys who have left our care return to celebrate with their girlfriends. Some of them even come with us to our daughter's house in Pennsylvania for Easter dinner."

It's obvious that Ruby and Ervin take their jobs seriously. Ervin is a Front-End Supervisor at Home Depot and believes strongly in the value of hard work. "Most of the teenagers that come here don't

understand how the world works," he says. "We constantly teach them about responsibility and real world expectations. We encourage them to have pride in how they present themselves, and in what they do."

Ruby and Ervin recently had an exciting transition at their group home; they now care for four teenage girls. They are helping the girls adjust to their new home and working on developing a connection with them. "It all happens at the dinner table," Ruby says, laughing. "We are getting to know each other every night by sharing stories and joking around. It takes time, as these kids aren't used to a family environment."

Ruby considers herself extremely fortunate to have grown up in a tight-knit, loving family. She had two strong maternal role models, her mother and her aunt, whom she adored. "**Being a Professional Parent is not a job for everyone,**" she says. "**You've got to have it in your heart. I was taught to never look down on someone unless you're extending your hand to lift them up.**"

The boys that Ruby and Ervin cared for had a great time at last year's agency holiday party for children in foster care.



Ruby was honored at the Nurturer's Among Us brunch by Children's Aid and Family Services for her work with vulnerable teenagers.

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It is only with **your** help that we can find caring and dedicated foster parents such as Ruby and Ervin, who are committed to teaching children that **they do matter**, while giving them loving guidance and the support they need to realize their full potential.

Please make a gift to this year's holiday appeal fundraiser at www.cafsnj.org or in the enclosed envelope.

*Together, we are changing lives.
Thank You!*



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