

# Independent Living Instructors and Social Workers: This Page Is for You

## Use *Represent* in IL Classes

Linda Rodriguez's diary (*Haunted House*, p. 30) brings to the surface a lot of issues that teens who are close to aging out would rather not talk about: loss, loneliness, lack of support from family. You can use her diary to get teens talking about topics they're afraid to discuss.

### Background: The Crash

Teens tend to shut down in the period before they leave care. A big reason for that is that leaving care is a major loss for teens. They lose whatever security and stability the system gave them, as well as many of their most important adult connections. Losing the stability they had in care triggers feelings about other losses in their lives. This transition to adulthood feels like another abandonment rather than freedom.

Staff can help soften the crash by encouraging a more realistic picture of life after care. Teens want our assurance that it's normal to feel depressed or make bad decisions, but they also want reassurance that they can recover from those setbacks. Acknowledge the good feelings of freedom, but also help them talk about the scary part: the pain and loneliness. By raising the tough issues, you are sending the

message that you think they have (or can develop) the inner resources to manage them.

### Story Summary

Linda Rodriguez recently aged out of care. Shortly afterward, her grandmother, who had been her kinship foster parent, died. Then she ended a "rocky" four year relationship and her brother got locked up. A lot of losses piled up at once.

This summer, Linda kept a diary about what her life was like during this period and she shares parts of it with the readers. It's full of ups and downs. Linda is so depressed she doesn't clean her apartment for months. Desperate not to be alone during the Fourth of July weekend, she spends \$200 to take a bus from New York to Chicago to see her mother, hoping that the trip will "ease my soul." When she gets home she finds herself drinking beer and crying on her bathroom floor.

At the same time, Linda has several strengths. She has a full-time internship, she is in college, and she's acting in a play. She stays in her grandmother's apartment, which has low rent, and has nearby friends that she can rely on.

### Lesson

**Topic:** Identifying scary issues (loss, loneliness, etc.) in a safe setting, to help equip teens for coping with those issues after they age out.

### Method:

- **Read the story aloud with a group.** (You can go around the room having everyone read a few paragraphs each.)
- **Ask the teens to underline a few sentences or phrases that stand out for them as you read along.**
- **Then have them read aloud some phrases they underlined.** Talk about what the phrases mean to them. (The items they underline are clues to the issues that they consider most important.)

### Discuss:

- One nice way to get the teens talking about these issues is to go around the whole room having each person read aloud one thing they underlined. (In a small group, people might read a couple things.) Don't comment until everyone has fin-

ished reading. Just let the sentences hang in the air and get people thinking to create a mood of reflection. Then ask one person to comment on why they picked a particular sentence. Ask if anyone else thought of picking that sentence, and why. Repeat this process with many sentences, making sure everyone gets a chance to contribute. (You may want to make mental notes about the issues each raises for later discussions.)

### Goals:

To bring to the surface some issues that teens are reluctant to talk about and, when possible, help them verbalize how they might deal with those issues. Don't give advice. Ask the group how the writer deals with her issues. Then ask the teens to offer suggestions to each other. By asking, you convey that you trust them to figure things out for themselves.

For more activities, go to:

[www.youthcomm.org/Teachers/TeacherResources.htm](http://www.youthcomm.org/Teachers/TeacherResources.htm)