

SEATTLE  
REP

# MARY JANE



BY AMY  
HERZOG

## Youth Guide

## Welcome to *Mary Jane*!

Theater is a place where we gather to witness one another's stories with attention and care. In *Mary Jane*, playwright Amy Herzog invites us into the daily life of a mother (the eponymous Mary Jane) as she cares for her medically fragile child. The play unfolds through intimate conversations in apartments and hospital rooms, where strangers become companions and small exchanges carry deep meaning. At its heart, this story asks what it means to show up for one another during long seasons of uncertainty.

As you watch, notice how community forms in quiet ways. A neighbor drops by. A nurse lingers to talk. A parent in a waiting room shares understanding. These encounters show how support networks grow through steady care and simple presence. Mary Jane's journey is personal, yet it is shaped by those around her, reminding us that even in isolation we are sustained by connection.

Though the story centers on one family, the need for community reaches beyond the stage. We all depend on circles of care that help us endure, and this play highlights how compassion can steady us in uncertain moments.

At Seattle Rep, we believe theater is part of that larger circle of connection. If this performance sparks your curiosity or inspires you creatively, we invite you to explore Young Rep, our programs for teens who want to engage more deeply with theater. Young Rep offers opportunities to learn and collaborate while building community with other young people who care about storytelling.

Thank you for being part of our audience and for engaging thoughtfully with this story. We hope *Mary Jane* encourages conversation, reflection, and a renewed appreciation for the communities that sustain us.

Enjoy the show,



**Deanna Martinez**  
Education & Community  
Programs Director

# Supporting Caregivers Builds Up Community — and Each Other

By Nicole Bearden, Seattle Rep Communications Manager

In Amy Herzog's masterful *Mary Jane*, we are invited into the world of a caregiving mother. As we dive into the experience alongside Mary Jane, we meet the other caregivers who become a network of support—sharing humor, spiritual camaraderie, information, and comfort.

In many cases, caregivers are unseen. Like Mary Jane, they are often unpaid and caring for family. The American Association of Retired Persons' (AARP) 2025 Report shows that over 63 million people in the U.S.—**1 in 4**—are “informal caregivers” (unpaid). You or someone you are close to is likely a caregiver. AARP CEO Myechia Minter-Jordan addresses the lack of systemic support for caregivers and those who need care:

“Family caregivers are a backbone of our health and long-term care systems—often providing complex care with little or no training, sacrificing their financial future and their own health, and too often doing it alone.”

We tend to think of caregivers as adults, but young people are caregivers too! According to Support Caregiving there are over 5,400,000 caregiving youth in the U.S. The org shared this graphic of the “Responsibilities of Caregiving Youth” that outlines many of the tasks that caregivers of all ages often take on:



## How can we support the caregivers in our own lives?

The Caregiver Action Network outlines some actions you can take to ease burdens on the caregivers in your life:

- **Offer Practical Help** like bringing meals, completing household chores (laundry, mowing the lawn, shoveling snow, walking the dog), offering to run errands, providing gift cards for meal delivery or groceries.
- **Give Them a Break**—stay with their loved one yourself (if you are qualified to care for them)

or arrange for/contribute to fund a qualified caregiver. Caregiving is a 24/7 job and can be exhausting.

- **Encourage Self Care in Concrete Ways** with a gift certificate to a salon or spa, or other activity that they enjoy, but don't have time to do while caregiving (and the ability to use it by helping to arrange care for their loved one).
- **Keep Them Included and Show You Care** by visiting, texting, listening, and continuing to invite them to activities even when they can't attend very often. Caregiving can be isolating, and as we see in *Mary Jane*, community makes all the difference.

## Mutual Aid as a Community Response

The lack of support for caregivers is a *systemic* issue, meaning it is widespread and affects our system(s) as a whole, not just a part of society.

Like many other systemic issues, the best way to support those in need is through **Mutual Aid**. Dean Spade, author of *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*, defines Mutual Aid as “collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from an awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them.”

Unlike charity, Mutual Aid is collective—we do what we can, and we work together to uplift everyone. That means while you are lifting others, other people are doing the same for you! Caregiving can often affect every aspect of a person's life—primary caregivers often can't work outside the home and can face financial issues like housing or food insecurity. Mutual Aid can benefit caregivers and those who need care.

But what does Mutual Aid mean for you? Solid Ground points to some key questions to ask ourselves:

- **Think about your own strengths.** What skills, knowledge, time, tools, or financial resources do you have? Are you bilingual? Can you grow food? Do you have a big kitchen? A car to give people rides in?

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Mutual Aid by Olly Costello.

- **Now think about your community.** What do your neighbors need? Grocery help? Childcare? Transportation to appointments?

Mutual Aid asks us to use our strengths to uplift our communities. This can also mean actions like:

- Donating blood—in Seattle, you can donate through Bloodworks NW and the American Red Cross
- Building websites or providing tech help for individuals or small groups through orgs like Digital Aid Seattle
- Sharing knowledge through Community Teach-Ins through orgs like WashMasks or El Centro de la Raza

On stage in *Mary Jane*, we see prime examples of a community coming together to lift each other up. Off-stage, we can do the same for our own communities.



Scan to read this article and view resources on Inside Seattle Rep.

## EXCERPT FROM

# Joy and Grief, Side-by-Side

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ALLISON NARVER

**Nicole Bearden (Seattle Rep Communications Manager):** *Mary Jane* deals with serious subjects, but the play itself doesn't fall into the trap of being heavy and sad. As a director, how are you approaching the staging to highlight the hope?

**Allison Narver:** For me, the hope in *Mary Jane* lives in community and in the present moment. The play doesn't deny pain, but it also doesn't allow pain to be the only story in the room. In staging, I'm focusing on warmth, light, and proximity. The spaces feel lived-in and human rather than bleak or clinical, and the actors are almost always in a state of active care—making tea, adjusting a blanket, sharing food, offering a chair.

Rhythm is also crucial. Herzog's dialogue has an everyday musicality with humor tucked into unexpected places. By honoring that rhythm and allowing the absurd or funny moments to land naturally, we remind the audience that joy and grief often sit side by side. Hope in this production isn't something we paste on top—it emerges from watching people show up for each other again and again.

**NB: What would you like audiences to know before they see this show?**

**AN:** I'd love audiences to know that they don't have to brace themselves. While *Mary Jane* deals with serious realities, it's also full of warmth, humor, and unexpected lightness. It's a play about care, about the strangers and near-strangers who carry us when we can't carry ourselves.

Most of all, it's an invitation to slow down and be present. If audiences allow themselves to sit with the quiet, I think they'll leave feeling not drained, but connected—to the characters, to each other, and maybe to people in their own lives whose quiet strength often goes unseen.



Scan to read the full interview with Allison on Inside Seattle Rep.

# Lesson: Your Layers of Support

In *Mary Jane*, Mary Jane cares for her son, Alex, while she is surrounded by characters that support her and her son as well. There are many types of support that we receive and provide; in this lesson we will explore some examples.

## SUPPORT FOR OTHERS

Write down people that you support and ways that you show them your support. Considering the resources listed in this Guide, what are some of your strengths? Using that knowledge, think about different ways you can help your community.

## SUPPORT FROM OTHERS

Think about the different forms of Mutual Aid outlined in this Guide. Now write down people who support you (friends, family members, neighbors, etc.) and ways that they show their support.

## SUPPORT FOR SELF

Write ways that you care for yourself. How do you relax and what makes you feel comfortable?

## REFLECTION

- Which circle was the hardest for you to fill?
- Are there things in common between two or three of the circles?
- At what times in someone's life might they need more support from their community?