CYC-Online

e-journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)

A Journal for those who live or work with Children and Young People

Issue 241 / March 2019

ISSN 1605-7406

The CYC-Net PRESS

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Editorial

Youth Who Have Changed Our Lives

Grant Charles

I reckon we like to think or maybe think we are supposed to think that the relationships with the young people who come into our lives are one way. I know that this concept can be strongly implied if not explicitly stated in our professional training. It is all about them and not much, if anything about us. There are so many problems with this way of thinking.

First, it implies an imbalance in the relationship that if you think about it is quite unhealthy. It sets us up to be some sort of superior being who can altruistically better the lives of others. This way of thinking has its roots in the child saving movement where the self-righteous middle and upper classes saw it as their duty to improve the lives of who they saw as the lesser classes and people. It was (and still is) based on a paternalistic/maternalistic view of the world that only served to degrade, invalidate and dehumanize others. It was the sort of thinking that brought us the Indian Residential School System in Canada, the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland, the orphan trains in the United States and any number of forms of "child rescue" around the world. Rather than rescuing children it, of course, left them open for often severe abuse and neglect. It made so many vulnerable children even more vulnerable that as of 2016 there were over 50 institutional abuse inquiries and redress schemes

occurring in various jurisdictions around the world. These were just the ones occurring at the time and does not include the large number of actions taken prior or subsequent to that period. Countless numbers of children and families were hurt, often intergenerationally, by this attitude.

Secondly, of course this way of thinking goes against everything we know about people. Relationships as we know are both bi-directional and reciprocal. Both people give and both people receive. That is what happens in relationships. There isn't a magic moment that occurs between a professional and someone they are working with that somehow changes the laws of relationships. Regardless of whether one recognizes it or not, as you are influencing a young person they are in turn influencing you. If the interaction is truly one way then it is not a relationship. It may be an interaction of sorts but it is not a relationship.

Given the known two-way nature of relationships, it is surprising how little has been written in our field about how the young people we work with influence us both as practitioners and as people. What is written often focuses on the negative impact as evidenced by the literature on vicarious trauma. This is important literature but it doesn't capture the amazing ways in which young people can teach us essential life lessons. It was with this in mind that I asked a number of people to write a story about how a young person changed their lives. This special edition is offered in memory of all of those young people who suffered at the hands of well-meaning but misguided professionals and in honour of those young people who have indeed changed our lives.

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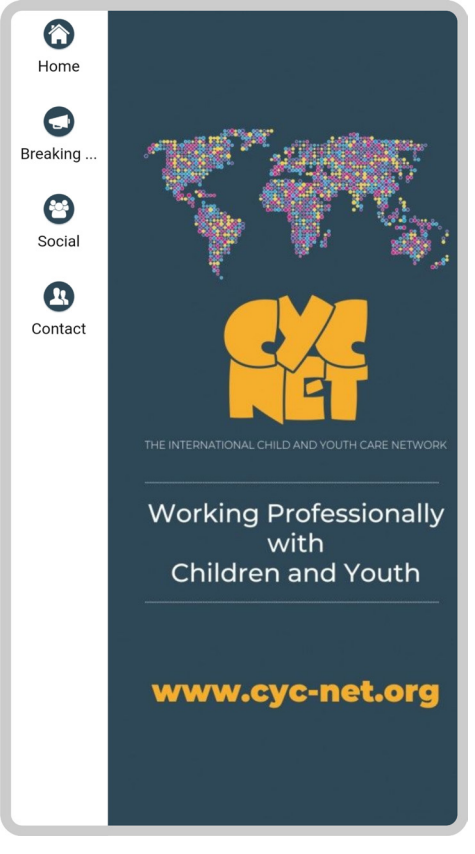

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I Am Still Not a Fan of Mashed Potatoes

Tina Kroll-Neary

There I was, the first day of my first work term where I was about to spend the next three months in a phase two open custody facility with eight young males. Someone decided that it was a great idea to send me into an environment where I was barely older than most of the young men that had been sent there to complete their disposition. I was definitely up for the challenge. I had been thinking about this day for the last few months, knowing that of course I would be the one to change the world overnight. Little did I know that my ability to talk a lot, to anyone, about anything, was not even close to enough in comparison to the therapeutic support these young men required. My transition from theory to practice was only just beginning. I had no understanding of how to practice self care, how to develop relationships, how to actually engage with the young person by listening to them instead of lecturing. I had no real understanding of any of this, until that first day of my first work term when I met 16-year-old Larry.

I arrived at 3:00 pm for the afternoon shift and after participating in orientation which lasted all of an hour, my supervisor gave me two pieces of advice before opening the door to send me out of the office; “do not let the boys find out how old you are and whatever you do, do not let them know when you are afraid of them.” Afraid of them? Well, I was certain I would have no reason to be afraid of them. I stepped out into the hallway

and proceeded into the living room where seven boys were sitting in front of the television. I said hello and observed not one of them acknowledge my existence. At that moment, the kitchen door opened and one of the workers called out to tell the boys it was time for dinner. They jumped up from their seats and walked past me to the kitchen area still with no inkling that I existed, while I looked up at each of them, much taller and bigger than me. My supervisor then came out and explained to me that one of the boys was 'OP' (off program) and therefore was not allowed to interact with his peers and had to sit in another room to eat his dinner. She suggested that I could sit and supervise him during this time and she would be in the next room with the others if I needed anything. How difficult could that be? She gave me his plate which consisted of meatloaf, mashed potatoes and peas. I went into the separate eating area and found the young man sitting at the table. He immediately met my gaze and unlike the others he totally acknowledged me, as a matter of fact his eyes were burning a hole right through me. I put the plate down in front of him, introduced myself and sat across the table from him. He continued to focus on me with a steely-eyed glare while very slowly beginning to eat his food. I thought to myself that this was great, I can talk to him without any disruption from the other boys and he would see that I was there to help, of course trust me right away and maybe tell me his whole life story by the time he finished with his meal. The conversation that ensued went something like this:

Me: So you must be Larry?

Larry: steely-eyed glare chewing food.

Me: I'm not sure what you did to end up in here by yourself but it must be nice to have some space from the others?

Larry: steely-eyed glare chewing food.

Me: So, how long are you in here for?

Larry: steely-eyed glare chewing food.

Me: I'm sure there is something you would like to talk about?

Larry: steely-eyed glare and deep voice "You need to stop talking".

He then put a forkful of mashed potatoes into his mouth.

Me: Well, the food looks pretty good anyways! Though I really am not a fan of mashed potatoes…

He continued to stare at me and in that moment his mouth emptied and my face was completely covered in mashed potatoes.

Larry: Ya, I don't like them much either.

And then he started to laugh…like full belly laughter at the table. I was completely frozen in my seat, mashed potatoes sliding down my face and the supervisor came in with a look of horror when she saw me, saving me from myself by quickly sending me out of the room to get cleaned up.

I went to the bathroom and took one look in the mirror and started to cry. This was not at all what I had expected. I could hear Larry, still

laughing, being reprimanded for his behaviour and then sent to his room without being able to finish the rest of his dinner. I couldn't help but think this was somehow my fault, I should have recognized he didn't feel like talking to anyone, especially some stranger. I knew it was all over and no doubt my supervisor would tell me not to come back. When I came out of the bathroom, she did send me home, but told me it was only to catch my breath and "reflect on what I had learned" and she would see me again the next day. "What I had learned" ...? I had learned that it only took two hours for me to discover I was going to be terrible at this job and all the kids were definitely going to hate me. I did however return the next day and all the days after that. The other boys got used to me being around, didn't seem to hate me too much and would invite me into their card games and conversations. The one thing that was consistent however was that Larry would never speak to me. I would still include him in conversations I was having with the other boys though by looking at him or making gestures towards him while I was talking. I would still do simple things for him like handing him things at the dinner table, dropping his laundry basket to him

in his bedroom, every time calling him by name and acknowledging him without any expectations in return.

The time passed quickly and my work term came to an end. A couple of the boys had made a cake for my last day and we celebrated at dinner. It was no surprise for me to learn that Larry had got himself into some trouble and was again on 'OP" and had chosen to stay in his room through dinner. The end of my shift arrived and after saying goodbye to the boys I ran upstairs and poked my head in Larry's bedroom door. "Hey, best of luck with the rest of the school year buddy, I hope you enjoy your summer!' and I turned around to leave. What happened after that was not understood till many years after. "Hey Tina!" ...I turned around, not masking the shock on my face, and there he was standing in his doorway. He reached out and handed me an envelope and with a slight smile on his face said "Maybe the next time you will stop talking when someone tells you too!" and he closed his bedroom door. I opened the envelope and there was a piece of paper inside that simply said "Goodbye".

Five years later I was taking a computer course at the local college and sitting outside enjoying a beautiful day. I looked over to see a group of young adults laughing together and sitting around a picnic table. The young man at the table glanced my way and I recognized him immediately as Larry. He quickly looked away without another glance. I remember thinking how pleased I was to see him. Attending college and looking happy and healthy. I assumed he had turned things around in his life since the last time I had seen him and he was now experiencing some success. About a week later I was sitting outside again when I heard "Hey, how ya doing?" I looked up smiling and said "Hey Larry, it's been a long time!" He said "you realize you were one of the only ones who had ever actually treated me like a real person instead of some badass kid that didn't deserve anything. Even though I was a jerk you would still include

me and talk to me and not at me. I was determined to never speak to you and figured you would eventually just go away but you didn't. I did something terrible to you and you never once treated me like the asshole I was. I hope you don't meet many kids like me along the way but if you do they will be pretty lucky." And with that he handed me a container and said "See you around" and walked away. The container when I opened it was full of mashed potatoes. I never saw Larry again.

I have met my fair share of young people who have contributed to my growth and development as a Child and Youth Care practitioner, but I did not discover until five years later how on this first day of my first work term it was the young person that would teach me. How to be humble, how to be honest, how to listen to the unspoken word and appreciate awkward silence. It was only then I realized how I would always be the student, always needing to be open minded and learning far more from the young person than they might ever learn from me. I also learned that I am still definitely not a fan of mashed potatoes.

Gabe and I

Patricia Cicogna

After 17 years of working as a Child and Youth Care practitioner for an amazing agency in Toronto (The George Hull Centre), my husband and I decided to move to Muskoka, a mostly small town region in Central Ontario. I quit my job with the intention of being a stay at home mom to our three children. I quickly learned that I am not the "stay at home" type of person. For my sanity, I went back to work. There are very few… actually no, there are no CYC jobs in Muskoka. I was hired as an EA (educational assistant) at a local elementary school.

As a Child and Youth Care practitioner, I had primarily worked with young people in the context of mental health and addictions. I had not worked with youth who were affected by autism. My knowledge of autism was limited and I believed that I did not have the skill set to work with people affected by autism. For the past ten years, I have worked almost exclusively with young people affected by autism (or autistic young people). In thinking about a young person who has changed who I am (as a professional and to some degree as a person), I want to share about my time with Gabe, who, when I first met him, was 10 years old and was later to be diagnosed with Asperger's. Gabe represents a major turning point in my professional life; I am writing about him because he led me to where I am today. He was in grade 5 when I was hired as his Educational Assistant to work with him. Everyone at the school was tired of dealing with him. He presented difficult behaviours and the professionals (teachers and school consultants) did not know how to support him or work with him. Most of

the school, including students and teachers, were afraid of him, which further isolated him.

I was given very little information about Gabe's diagnosis (at that time) and his behaviours (I later found out it was PDD-NOS, anxiety and ODD). He was being slowly reintegrated into the school, which meant that for three quarters of the day we were in a room away from his class. We were assigned to a 7x12 room, known as the "Blue room". This is where we worked and played and where he got to know me and I got to know him.

Gabe was an active boy, academically very smart but he did not have any friends and when he had behavioural struggles they tended to be of the grandest kind. He was also a bit of a showman and loved attention. He was a very tall boy and often mistaken for being older than he was. It took me some time to understand Gabe and his behaviours. There were some memorable moments we shared that left me questioning if I was being helpful or if I was perpetuating some of his behaviours.

I recall one occurrence that left quite a strong impression on some of Gabe's classmates. Gabe was having a particularly rough day; I don't remember the antecedent to this incident because it exploded so quickly. Gabe was running around the school, ripping things off walls, throwing things off the stage, throwing shoes in the halls and not responding to any suggestions I was offering. While I was trying to minimize disruption to classes, Gabe began to have a bloody nose and wanted into his classroom. The door was locked, Gabe could not get in, he was banging on the door for at least five minutes but no one was letting him in. He decided that if no one was going to let him in he would make faces at the classroom window. He quickly started finger painting on the windows with his blood as his classmates watched in horror. The principal decided to call his parents for support to help him deescalate, as he was not responding to anyone. They

came and picked him up. After a couple of days of suspension, Gabe and his parents had a re-entry meeting and it was business as usual.

In grade seven, Gabe brought his pet rat to school as a "therapeutic" service animal. Foofoo was his name. I foolishly informed Gabe that I have a fear of rodents. It became Gabe's mission to help me deal with this fear. He would try to hug me with Foofoo inside his sleeve or he would tell me to close my eyes and pretend it was a cat and just pet him with one finger and then try two fingers. Gabe went to the library and signed out books on rats to educate me. When that didn't work, he signed out books on phobias. It became his new interest (which diverted the focus off of my fear), and gave me the opportunity to watch him turn into the teacher and I into the learner. This rat episode reminded me that young people, no matter their behaviour, have enormous capacity, and also desire, to teach and to give back. Sadly, (not sadly for me), Foofoo died during summer vacation.

In grade seven, Gabe's family had him reassessed, which is when he received the Asperger's syndrome diagnosis. The school developed an autism support classroom which Gabe attended for social skills support and reinforcement. He developed some friendships and was learning to understand himself better. While I am not generally focused on diagnostics, I did have an opportunity to experience how a diagnosis can in fact change the way we respond to young people's needs, and sometimes that works out well.

The special education teacher advocated for me to go to The Geneva Centre (an autism-focused institution in Toronto that provides both services and training and education) for some autism training. This helped me learn something about the school system, where without teacher support, support staff such as Educational Assistants have a very limited voice and virtually no capacity to seek professional development based on their own judgment of what they might need. I took the Autism Intervener Level 1 certification course, which helped me fine tune how I worked with Gabe. Due to the growing need for social skills supports within the school (and the absence of child and youth care practitioners in this school board), I became the Educational Assistant that ran social skills groups for students from across the school. As a result, my time with Gabe was reduced and he was introduced to two more Educational Assistants to work with. Although I enjoyed doing group work with a range of young people, I lamented the reduced time I got to spend with Gabe, who by this time occupied a significant space in my heart.

By the eighth grade Gabe was integrated three quarters of the day in his classroom. When we got to a place of trust and connection, Gabe's behavioural meltdowns became less. Gabe told us that he felt good about going into high school and he was excited that he had some friends going with him.

I think because I had worked so many years with youth who were affected by mental health issues, being introduced to autism allowed me to push myself further and tear down the preconceived wall that I had built about my skills. Working with Gabe exposed me to working in the public school system with its many down falls. At a time when autism diagnoses were rapidly growing, I was witness to how one school in Muskoka made mistakes, explored, and learned about the needs of young people affected by autism. I appreciate that many schools, and many individual

professionals within schools, are really trying to provide meaningful services and supports to young people with autism. My experience, however, has been overwhelmingly negative with the capacity of schools to shift their culture and to let go of their deep view that they are experts on everything that happens inside their walls. Overall, the experiences of young people with autism in schools (in Ontario) are not good and feature many concerning dynamics. Because I am a (proud) cynic, I could no longer accept, participate and stand by the school system's way of support and education of children and youth affected by autism.

Recently, I completed the Autism and Behaviour Science post graduate certificate at a local college. I am now working as an IBI (Intensive Behaviour Intervention) Instructor Therapist in a section 23 classroom for children who will be integrating into mainstream public elementary schools. IBI is not based on child and youth care values or approaches. It has its strong points and it certainly matters to families struggling to get through the day with children and youth facing enormously high needs. But I do miss the much more relationally focused child and youth care approaches to being with young people.

I think of Gabe often and wonder how he is. He is the same age as my oldest son, and I wonder where life has led him now that he is into his 20s.

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CYC-Online
e-journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)

March 2019
ISSN 1605-7406
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There Was a Little Girl

Kelly Shaw

I often think that the most difficult part of being a Child and Youth Care Practitioner is the learning about yourself that is evoked because of the relationships that you choose to engage in and the change that it can elicit. Even when that learning is uncovering strengths, it is learning and when we encounter change it can trigger some existential crisis during which the world feels a little off kilter. Sometimes the learning comes with immediate reflection and supervision and sometimes it comes years later in sneaky ah-ha moments, and sadly, sometimes it doesn't come at all.

I want to share with you a story about love. I have always worked more easily with youngsters who gender identify as male or queer than I have with those who identify as girls. But, twenty-one years ago a little girl was literally dropped off in the residential treatment program where I worked, her belongings in grocery bags. She was full of energy, and loved to play, and was keen to seek nurturing from many of the fantastic adults on the team where I worked. I was partnered as the key worker with this youngster and her family.

As playful as she was with my colleagues, she behaved as though she despised me. She hid my coat at the end of a 12 hour shift, she refused to settle into bed when I was on late shift, she called me names, or ignored me. She was perfectly behaved with almost all of my colleagues yet reminded me of the Girl With a Curl in the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "...when she was good she was very good indeed..." (my

colleagues experience) "… but when she was bad she was horrid…" (my experience).

I had a dreadful time separating her behaviour from my own feelings of rejection – as my colleagues got to play all kinds of fun games and were not able to empathize with my tiredness or frustration – they just simply didn't have the same experience. As this curly-haired girl and I journeyed through our relationship development amid goal planning, school struggles, structures, and routines over the eight months she stayed with us – I became absolutely enthralled with her spunkiness, and soon began to admire her perseverance and tenacity. I became able to see these strengths and let go of my need for her to like me, something I had never been able to do in that way with a female youth previously. This change in my way of exploring my own feelings and my own adolescent experience was pivotal in my practice journey.

I am grateful to my supervisor and team lead for being able to support my supervision as I developed in relationship with this youngster. I am grateful to my colleagues who at the time I was often quite angry with. They stayed with me, listened to me vent about how I was experiencing this curly girl and gently but consistently challenged me to get out of my own way and shift to being other focused.

Just a few years ago I again encountered this curly girl. She had stayed connected with a number of the Child and Youth Care Workers who had supported her when she stayed in our program, and she shared with me what she had learned from us. She was so very articulate in outlining that she had learned about unconditional caring from us, and the importance of the routines and structure we held for her. She talked about her own journey into parenthood and how she was able to understand her time with us and the work that we did together differently now that she had her own child.

She thanked me for all that we had taught her. I quickly replied, "You taught me a lot too." She immediately wanted to know what she had taught me. "You taught me about love," I replied. She became more curious and in true curly girl fashion asked some skilled probing questions. I felt very vulnerable in the conversation – I hadn't intended to share with her in this way, exposing myself. Yet, if I hadn't intended to, I suppose I shouldn't be doing this kind of work!

Laura Steckley talks about threshold concepts – I often think of this curly girl as a threshold experience. Being in relationship with her changed me, my practice, and my relationships with adolescent girls and beyond. I had such admiration for her resilience, and I cared so much about her wellbeing that I was able to engage in my own self exploration in order to ensure that I stayed therapeutically engaged and emotionally attuned with her – rather than avoiding her because of the strong emotions I felt.

That curly girl taught this curly girl that love for the youngsters we work with is essential. That we need to feel that love for others so that we stay in the tough stuff, and ultimately, our relational engagement deepens our love for self.

Child & Youth Care Practice

Collected Wisdom for New Practitioners

Patricia Kostouros and Michelle Briegel

Editors

Chris, Ava and Jenny

Ernie Hilton

My first shift as a Child and Youth Care worker (CYC) was in the middle 80s after securing a government summer-grant job at a group care facility. It would be an understatement to say I was poorly trained or even adequately prepared for such an important role. Thank goodness things have significantly changed in that regard with respect to opportunities to learn and integrate knowledge into practice. I am less certain much has changed when it comes to integration of the developmental learning process of how to be an effective care-giver even though there is an appreciable body of literature on the concept. I will share three experiences from different times in my career. It was easy to recall many experiences after 33 years but some recollections jumped to the forefront of my memories and I noticed they were connected to each ceiling of my vanity, ego and competence. I am not certain whether the young people I worked with changed me or if I ultimately changed me, however, I do think it is a distinction worth exploring. I believe if I am going to take credit for my evolution I must also therefore take blame for the lack of changes. I do know the young people I have worked with own nothing of my incompetence, frustration, and ineffective practice.

At 21 years old, with a bachelors degree in sociology and without much life experience I was apparently suitably trained to work with some of society's most marginalized and traumatized young people at an eight-bed group care facility for young men, ages 14-18. It was there I met "Chris". Although I was without any useful training or theory I loved activities as did

the young men I worked with while the other, more experienced workers loved that I took the boys out of the facility almost every shift. I would take them fishing, play football, go to the beach and all without any intentional therapeutic purpose. I didn't know what else to do and this seemed to endear everyone to me and that was apparently important to me. I had no knowledge that activity-based programming and being with the young people was creating a connection and subsequently safety within our relationship. I was therefore not prepared for the disclosures that were to come. Trailblazers such as Gerry Fewster, Mark Krueger, and Karen Vander Ven were not in my world then and I didn't understand the concepts and power of being-with, rhythmicity and activity-based programming. I was connecting, engaging and recklessly meddling in their pain-based behaviour. I thought I was just playing but to Chris I was forging a meaningful relationship, a relationship where he began to trust.

As the summer turned into the fall and my summer grant was coming to an end I was asked to stay on at the group care facility and I was elated. Now at $5.80 an hour I was raking it in having come up from $4.00 an hour. Over the summer, I had inadvertently laid the ground work to be trusted, as much as a CYC worker can be trusted by the young people we serve. Chris had come to our program from a psychiatric facility for adolescents and when triggered could become threatening and violent. It was unnerving at times. Although, his outbursts were never with me as I was rarely "authoritarian". That role was left to more senior workers. Sometimes, I was left specific instructions on which consequences had to be enforced that were left-over from the last shift. I was rarely opposed by the young people as they were smart enough to know that was my task and I didn't know or couldn't do any better. I had been dubbed the "soft-one" by the staff and the "playful-one" by the youth. Basically, I had very little credibility except in my predictability to take unwanted or last-minute shifts.

This one particular shift, I was once again aimlessly and obliviously meandering around the facility during “quiet time” and stopped in at Chris’s room where he was listening to music on his Walkman. He invited me in and so I complied, clearly breaking the rule of leaving them alone during quiet time but I forgot. I knew Chris’s history, not from a file but from gossip-type conversations in the staff office about how he once ran away and climbed up on the roof of a building and camped out. Another time, he climbed the ladders on the MacKay Bridge that spans the harbour between Dartmouth and Halifax. The police had to get him down after he ascended close to 300 feet up the ladders. It was very dangerous. He also had the unmistakeable remnants of scar tissue on his wrists left from obviously lonely and hopeless moments. As I stood in his room, I uttered the most reckless words I could have ever uttered looking back, I said, “What’s up?” After a summer of unknowingly forging a trusting, respectful relationship with Chris he began to disclose his menu of childhood abuse and associated trauma along with his plans to eventually kill himself. After the first few minutes, as I stood in his doorway, I stopped hearing anything he was saying, and tunnel vision and fear replaced my incompetence. I do remember hearing him say at the end of this privileged encounter, “If you say anything to the other staff I will kill myself.” I had five hours left in my shift until 11pm but it took less than an hour to share what he told me with the other staff person. I was stunned for about 45 minutes. The next day, the supervisor of the program, Chris and I sat and discussed things. Chris let me off the hook by saying, “I knew you would tell and I’m not mad.” I had no words other than “thank you.” Chris eventually left the program, became a dad and we lost touch, If he is alive he would be in his mid-40s. Chris taught me the importance of needing to understand theory, intention, and caution. Chris taught me the pitfalls of arrogance, fearlessness and the need for self-awareness.

My second story. It was now the mid 90s, I was the supervisor of a program that attempted to keep safe young people who were being sexually exploited. Ava had been adopted as a young baby by two "professional" parents, of the middle-class ilk. This was the only relevant information shared at the time. Somewhere along the way her mild-mannered, pre-adolescent disposition became more akin to the normal, natural development of a 14 year old but her family wasn't suffering such insolence. So, not unlike today, there was no such thing as preventative family-work to avoid coming into care and Ava was placed in our program. She was flirting with some unsavoury characters, undoubtedly to upset her parents for a purpose, and it worked.

Ava was one of the most intelligent young people I had ever met, both academically and in her maturity. She was also a privileged young woman by socio-economic standards but her sense of belonging was absent. Ava had been adopted at a very early age and eventually had no desire to connect with her adoptive mom but was mannerly with her. She did enjoy spending time with her adoptive dad who would be in tears every time we talked about her while in the program. In the beginning, her time with us was without concern but after several months there was a noticeable decline in her well-being. We were failing her. Before too long, we knew she was becoming immersed in the drug culture, using crack cocaine, recruiting and prostituting.

By this time in my career, I was becoming familiar with literature of the CYC field and had the privilege to learn from professionals like Grant Charles, Thom Garfat, Henry Maier, Lorraine Fox, Karen Vander Ven, Gerry Fewster, Jack Phelan, Brian Gannon and Mark Krueger. We had the internet and the CYC-Net had begun. I had a more assured, responsible confidence that there were professionals out there we could access and we were not alone. I recognized the complexities of relational work, then called relationship-based work. However, I had no idea how to help a young woman who rejected our efforts to keep her safe as she chose street life over group-care life. Thankfully, I worked with a group of CYCs who were open to radical interventions and it was a time when we were permitted to be creative. We were open to augmenting our approach to do what needed to be done to keep the young women safe. I was learning to be where people lived their lives.

This story begins with a rainy night and we felt certain that Ava would be out working the stroll. Two of us decided to go to the stroll and confirmed she was there. As we tried to connect and encourage her to come back she rejected our bids, quietly and mannerly at first as was her way. Our persistence was not well received as we offered to get her some food as we followed behind her as she walked her stroll and away from us. At one point she turned around with a transformed look and the anger she let loose on us was quite raw. Her vicious tirade stopped us from following and she vehemently encouraged us to go our own way and leave her alone. We pleaded with her one last time to come with us and she turned and with sobbing tears said, “If you don’t leave I won’t break and I will get beat”. For those who don’t know the term “break” it means get the amount of money she was expected to earn for her pimp. I remember being left with a feeling of helplessness that I had never had before. I offered one last attempt at engagement which, in retrospect, probably hurt more than it

helped, I yelled, “You know where your bed is if you want it, we are always there!” The other worker and I left her out there to walk her stroll in the rain, alone. Ava, over the next several months came in and out of our program as often as she wanted until later in December when she came for a holiday celebration we were having for past residents of the program. She came through the door and I gasped. I couldn’t and didn’t hide my reaction. She was skin and bones, her teeth looked awful, her physical being was so worn my body had a reaction. She looked as though death was imminent but she was back. Ava would be about 38 today, she is alive and has a daughter and is doing amazingly. Ava taught me that a program that rejects the young person and their behaviour that the program was designed for in the first place should evolve. I learned it is not my job to give up.

Finally there is Jenny, I met her later in my career. I no longer work with young people directly. I am the older, father, grandfather-looking fella who does something upfront in the admin area. I usually have a container of assorted candy available for youth and employees and am not abhorrent enough to not stop by for a sugar-fix before anything else interesting is happening; at least Jenny used to think so. By now I have read a book or two on this thing we do called relational child and youth care practice. I have gone ahead and secured some useful, relevant education along with having adopted a way of being that has been researched and informed by many wise sages in our field.

Jenny was a beautiful spirit, with a mischievous playfulness and happy disposition who would come up to my office on a semi-regular basis for candy and to unload disparaging phrases on the conduct of the CYC workers who were attempting to provide care. I would concede that good help is hard to find shifting the conversation and asking her what control it is she thinks she would like to have? Without hesitation she alerted me it

was about wanting to live with her mom. She didn't have a hateful bone in her body and truly loved "her staff" as she called them.

Jenny wasn't allowed to live with her mom because of some section of the Child and Family Services Act, is how she described it. This section was of course "fu$$#!* stupid!!" in her words. I believe the Act reads differently. It was her social worker's goal to get her adopted. You see, there was a push on to get adolescents adopted to raise the percentages on the adoption policy outcomes (says me and my empirical perspective of the time). Jenny was less than interested in the outcome reporting data results and her role in that process.

My learning begins with the day she was going to meet her potential adoptive parent. As the service provider we had never met this person before either. It was a scheduled meeting and it was going forward regardless of our or Jenny's thoughts on the matter. You know, those outcomes that matter to children. Before leaving for her meeting, a CYC worker called me and said Jenny wanted to come to my office and see me. I said, "sure!" and wondered for a moment noting it was odd as Jenny never asked before given her prerogative to drop in unannounced whenever she wished. I hear her loudly coming up the hall yelling something like "This meeting is fuc$$ing stupid and I ain't goin'!!" She plunked herself down in the chair in my office and she had her head down. I said, "You are not so keen to go meet the lady?" Jenny looked up and said, "No, I don't want to go, it's stupid". While her response was clear so too was the implication behind her newly applied facial makeup. Jenny had painted her face to look like a cat, complete with black whiskers and a black button nose. I said, a little taken aback, "You are made up like a cat?" "Yup!" she said in her most indignant voice. I said, "That should do it" Jenny said "Do what?" "Scare the potential adoptive-parent away" I said, "I hope so" she quietly uttered and it did. They had the meeting and that application for adoption

no longer included Jenny. Jenny went on to participate in some nefarious activities over the next few years with us. Today she is alive, mid-twenties, and is doing amazingly.

Jenny taught me that while we, the alleged care-givers and alleged child-protection agency, think we know best and believe our needs are relevant, the needs of the young people are complex and it is incumbent on us to drill down to support (in the words of Leon Fulcher) the outcomes that matter to them. We need to not simply support them but act as tireless advocates to lift their voice to a place that matters, to a place that serves their needs, not program mandates, and governmental service/policy outcomes.Their needs matter.

John Lennon once said, “I would like to say thank you and on behalf of the group and ourselves I hope we passed the audition”. He too could just as easily have been a youth in care if born 30 years ago. How much talent and lives have we oppressed thinking we know better?

Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

Volume 31 Issue 4 / 2018

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ISSN 2410-2954

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It's All a Matter of Change

Garth Goodwin

Recently I was poking around on the electronic digital hard drive or master vault of images finding things long forgotten. Among them was a suite of images taken at an Olympics of sorts at one of the cottages that hosted the summer programs for two homes, boys and girls separated by distance but brought together for recreational and other events. There were races on land, water and by canoe. This was early on in the private practice phase of my career. Among the images was a fine showing one of the girls in the water with the group home dog framed by a few red canoes. I paused and lingered on this image noting the purity of it as the recollections of around, perhaps even more than forty years bubbled up. It's hard to call the moments of change in group work. The truth of the matter is change is constant and usually reciprocal within a relationship that warps and woofs its way along until it is time, a general sense of readiness, and/or the arbitrary factors of age or charges force the issue of separation bringing it to a close. This young lady was different though as she forced a change upon me that turned the tables on my perception of our relationship, of our shared history and of child and youth care itself.

You never do know what a new referral will bring. Usually, there is a honeymoon phase, an engagement phase in which issues emerge more accurately, a relationship phase out of which that blend of maturity and healing rights those issues and a conventional competence is achieved and the person moves on. All that did indeed take place with this person. She was vibrant, usually positive and headfast. The owner/operator of the

home based his program on being in command of both youth in care and his staff. This young lady ran right up against this by daring to give him some of his own medicine throwing people off the dock. She was ordered to sit on the porch until she could apologize and sit she did, in her swim suit, with the mosquitoes from the afternoon to the early am hours. The compliment of the home was to carry on taking meals, enjoying board games and snacks throughout the evening all while ignoring her. For many, it was awkward, disturbing and painful until it was brought to a close with a quietly delivered apology. Fortunately, greener grass in the child and youth care business was found in another province and the home was sold to a member of the staff.

The team carried on encouraged with the change in supervision from an obvious manipulator to perhaps the polar opposite as it turned out, a man of few words who enjoyed the work, the young people and the social aspects of the work. A new summer cottage was invested in perfect for the younger demographic the group was favoring. The young lady remained effervescing in outlook, ready to try new experiences, most positive but some dark and harmful. About five years on the owner/operator was clearly favoring one of the girls in the program, enough that team members and some youth voiced distress and concern. This percolated to the point of the authorities coming in and interviewing everyone involved. The investigation was inconclusive, the youth in question was discharged and the wife/co-owner/operator became the supervisor of the home while her husband went on to other businesses. The young lady was aging up into later adolescence and the couple transferred her to their home as a foster placement. It fell to me to look after her when they took vacations, something I enjoyed as I had always done. She was dealing with the move from the inner city to the suburbs and had much novelty to deal with. Then we were invited to her wedding to a young fellow held at his parent's home

with her foster father doing the honors of giving her away. As per usual, she was happy and looking forward to the future. This period was among the very best I experienced in youth care. A committed team who enjoyed each other ready to go to the mat for each other and the home such as when we had to take the youth into our homes while our fire damaged unit was repaired. There was a real sense of a positive reputation which brings one referrals that would benefit from the program and support for them if it was needed. It was all good until a family member of the owner passed and the decision was taken to sell the business and return to private life. I had never known such pain and loss until that point. This work is always your life's work as it is so constant and when that work is rewarded with a good life it is even better. The business went to a company with a background dealing with the vulnerable as opposed to the emotionally disturbed; predictability vs. chaos. They were done and dusted within six months.

A decade and more passed. For me there was a new team, a new program with a familiar fit and as impressive a success. The couple had divorced and moved back, the wife continuing to work in youth care as she had to. There would be the odd reunion to catch up. A news item inspired another when the young lady of this story took the former owner/operator to court for sexual abuse. Remarkably, his former wife reported he plead guilty on arrest. He lost his job, his second marriage and was put on the registry but there was no time to serve as the statute of limitations had run out. All the rumors, the innuendo, and the mystery had been confirmed but not with the suspected girl involved. It was a case of profound shock. Again several years went by and one evening the phone rang. It was the now not so young lady calling quite purposefully to tell her story. She was supported by the other girl in her taking her case to court. Both had been abused by the man. She told me when it first happened she was very angry

with the foster mother who went so far as to charge her for her bed sheets when she left home as they were group home inventory. Then it became personally very ugly. Cleaned up for publication, she told me she did not understand why I did not want to have sexual intercourse with her when I looked after her. She expected that from males. I sat there suddenly numbed, gutted as our respective history took a complete 180. All I could do is remind her why I was there.

A few years ago the foster mother, my employer, owner/operator and my friend passed with cancer. She had enjoyed her own second marriage and a career as an educational assistant, one responsible to guide youth in caregiving. Hundreds attended her evening of celebration and it was evident her love had touched many. It was never supposed to be like this. Care living is so chaotic, so rushed and so complexly rich, it truly needs a debriefing session in retirement but it was not to be. My initial reaction was to throw that entire history like something gone rotten in the fridge but fortunately, there are also positive life forces and memories that resist such thoughts.

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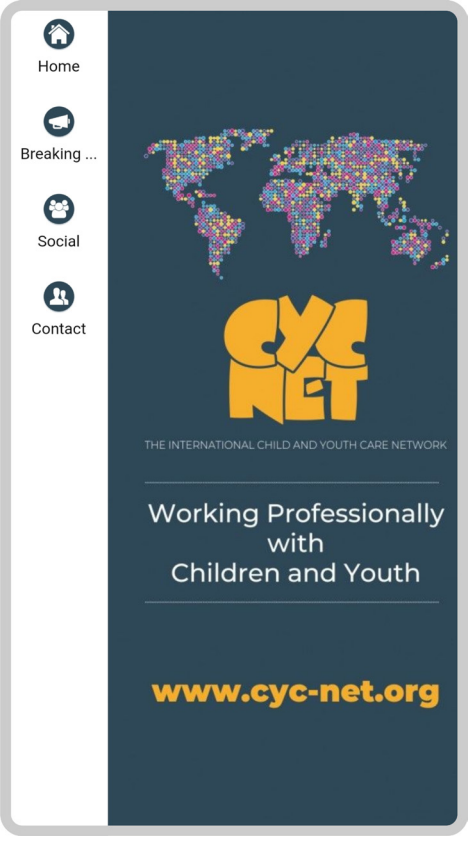

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Embedded in My Heart

Catherine Hedlin

There are two major changes I've experienced which are inspired by the challenging, delightful, and personable kids I had the honour, and sometimes, the pleasure of working with. While I have attributed these changes to two youth, there are many more who also played a role in my growth.

Love

Sara came from a family where it is unlikely love was a regular topic of conversation. An only child of older parents, she came into care after being victimized in the community. With her history of trauma and neglect, Sara moved into residential treatment directly from home. I was her keyworker. All of 23 years old, I knew it all.

Sara's family had moved communities every couple of years. She didn't have a lot of friends and most of the kids in her new home frightened her. Her room became her safe place, but we (in our great wisdom) would not allow her to hide out there. Her goals always included one on building better peer relationship skills. But for Sara, companionship and support came from staff not her peers.

Where or how Sara learned about love, I don't know, but she had. Her capacity to give love and to inspire love in others was amazing. When she first saw me, she would get this happy look on her face and immediately came over for a hug. There was always a compliment, a question about how I was doing, and a sense that I mattered to her – a lot. She liked to

cuddle, to help staff and to get attention in return. Fairly quickly, I came to look forward to that hug and compliment. On a bad day, it added a little sunshine.

Sara remained in our program longer than she probably needed because it became her home. She blossomed surrounded by people who talked to her, cared about her and expected her to succeed. Staff all enjoyed her company. Anytime the word “discharge” was mentioned she became distraught. Finally, the decision was made that she had to move on. A wonderful foster home was found, and visits began. Sara’s response was to run away repeatedly to demonstrate that she was not ready to leave. Whenever she returned, she’d ask if she could stay with us now and we’d say no. Ultimately, discharged on the run, her belongings were moved to her new home. Next time she came back, we drove her to her new family who quickly became as loving as we had been.

Love was not an acceptable four-letter word in professional practice when I began in the field. Boundaries between youth and staff needed to be maintained. Love was part of your personal life, not your professional. You were always to remember that the youth would only be with us for a limited period. “You are not their families.”

Sara taught me that love in a group home is not a four-letter word. That every youth needs and deserves love – too many believe they are unlovable. While it is rare to build that level of relationship with each one you meet, this is a gift to both give and receive in this work. I am much more open to this possibility and no longer hesitate to mention love as one of the important components of child and youth care work. Every youth deserves hugs, compliments and interest in their life.

Success

As a nice, middle class white girl, personal success was easy to define. It included graduating from high school and then going to university – no trade schools allowed. Probably it meant marriage – to a man, as I had no inkling of the vast spectrum of sexual and gender identities – and having a couple of children who also graduated high school, university and got married. Owning a house, travelling the world and doing work that 'mattered' was also important. In my early years in Child and Youth Care, I assumed this was a 'normal' life course open to almost everyone. I was very young and naive. I had no idea the privileged life I led or how unlikely my definition of success was for many of the youth we serve, either because they would not or could not attain it, even if it was their dream. Context was not something we talked about in those days.

Early in my career, I was the keyworker for Jason. Bounced around many foster homes in his early years, his long-term foster home broke down in his middle adolescence. He was angry, hurt and confused. These feelings came out in violent outbursts, frequent running and generally superficial relationships. He was also smart, attractive, funny, and articulate.

One of the most powerful learning moments in my early career came on a day I took Jason to a court appearance. I don't remember what for. It could have been related to his child welfare status or to a minor criminal charge. He looked well-groomed and presentable for his court appearance. On the way home, we stopped for a Slurpee. Courteously, he held the door for me to enter the market. Several youths, called 'head-bangers' at that time, were in the store. I turned around to talk to Jason and discovered he was no longer the youth from a microsecond earlier. He had run his hand through his hair, and his posture and facial expression were totally different. He became one of them. I had heard of chameleons prior to that but never experienced it. Back in my car, he returned to the Jason I knew

again. Trying to speak with him about it, naming this behaviour as unusual made no sense to him. It was a lesson in basic survival. I never forgot this lesson.

A few months later, I came into work and Jason was gone. Apparently, the police showed up, charged him with several violent crimes and moved him to the Young Offenders Centre pending trial. I never knew what happened to him. At the time, it felt like we had failed him. He certainly didn't resemble my narrative of a successful life. I assumed his life would become a cycle of incarceration with occasional bouts of freedom.

That could have been the end to this story but it isn't. About ten years later a friend of mine, Jennifer, who had also worked with Jason, was at the hospital with a pregnant teen. Two twenty-something year old men entered the hospital room, proceeding to tell Jennifer they were there to take the young woman away and there was nothing she could do about it. However, at that point, Jennifer and Jason recognized each other. Jason was excited to see her, asking after me, and generally catching up. After introducing her, he proceeded to convince his friend that if Jennifer was involved, leaving his girlfriend under her care was the right thing to do. He spoke of his time with us as being a 'good thing' and persuaded him that his girlfriend and baby would have better opportunities if he left her under Jennifer's care.

Jennifer called me that evening, sounding a little frantic as she relayed the story. Forced to re-evaluate my ideas of Jason, of the work we did with him, and of how successful that work was, I began to examine my ideas of success. Were we successful with Jason? Had he grown up to be the nice, middle class man that I previously defined as being successful? No. But had he been willing to stand up for someone else? Possibly put himself at risk? Yes. Had we been successful in our time with Jason? I still don't know. I have come to realize that success looks very different than what I

previously believed. Success will look different for each child, youth and family we work with, and I may never know what their definition of success is, never mind whether it is attained.

While I believe that love is an important component of Child and Youth Care practice and success is personal and unique to each individual, the most important learning I took from Sara and Jason, and the many other youth I worked with over the years, was the importance and power of relationships. Although occasionally I run into someone I worked with as a youth, for the most part, I never know what happens to them. I have learned to believe in the process, to trust that the relationships we build and the love we share, makes a difference. I have changed. I have faith in the components of Child and Youth Care practice: life-space, strength-based practice, relational, developmental, and activity based. I am neither young nor naïve anymore. I understand, and integrate into my practice, concepts like privilege, context, social justice and equity. While I embody a little bit of every youth encountered over the years, my learning from Sara and Jason is embedded in my heart. The person and the practitioner I am today came from the relationships developed with Sara, Jason and every other youth I worked with. I am thankful to each and every one of them.

Child & Youth Care Practice

Collected Wisdom for New Practitioners

Patricia Kostouros and Michelle Briegel

Editors

Mattering in the Moment

Grant Charles

I once went on a six-day hike on the West Coast Trail on Vancouver Island with a group of young people. It is a beautiful hike, but hard. There's lots of climbing and descending and slippery sections in the rainforest. There were three staff. All of us were senior managers in the agency. All were very experienced working with young people but none of us had been front line workers for a number of years. It was a put together group of young people none of whom really knew each other or us. No relationships in this group. Anyway, without going into detail, it was in many ways the trip from hell. The young people couldn't be described as being highly motivated to do the hike although I thought that they were quite motivated in terms of being oppositional. In fact, high marks for them in this area. They were among the finest I have seen. The best times were when they were telling us how much they hated us, the trip, the food and so on. The worst times were, well, really as bad as you can imagine when you are in tough situations with kids you don't know and who don't know you.

On the last night of the trip I was exhausted. I wanted to get away from the young people. I just wanted to go home. I made myself a cup of tea after dinner and retreated to the shoreline where I sat on a rock and watched the sun go down over the ocean. I lost myself in the beauty of the moment so much so that I hadn't realized at first that two of the young people had struggled up to me on either side like kids do with an adult they like. The three of us sat there for the longest time with the closeness

CYC-Online
e-journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)

March 2019
ISSN 1605-7406

that people can have at a special moment. Nothing was said. No one moved. We just sat there soaking in the beauty of the moment. Then, suddenly, they both seemed to realize that they were sitting with the 'enemy'. They shook themselves out of the moment, one told me to 'fuck off" and they scurried away. This to me was one of the highlights of my career. Tough times, a shared moment and being told to 'fuck off".

I often go back in my mind to this interaction. There was a humanity in that moment with those two young men. Despite all of our struggles on that hike they were able to tell me, however fleetingly, that I mattered to them. All I wanted to do that day was to be finished with them and go home but they didn't let me. They forced me, intentionally or not, to be in the moment with them. It was a beautiful gift. I have tried since then to be that way with everyone. While I am of course not always successful at it, living the lesson they taught me that day will always be a goal.

Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

Volume 31 Issue 4 / 2018

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ISSN 2410-2954

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Transitions and Early Learning

Jenny McGrath

I met Anne many years ago and despite the passing time and now physical distance between us, we are still connected. I requested her permission to discuss our relationship and asked if she would like to be involved in the process. We talked about what we learned from one another and she read and edited the draft before it was submitted. It is important for me to start with this information because one of things I learned from working with Anne is that honesty, genuineness and transparency matter. I learned plenty from Anne, likely much more than she learned from me, so it is impossible to share everything here. As such, I have chosen five key lessons.

First, whenever possible, include family when working with youth. In Anne's case, there were already several family members positively engaged in her life. They became regulars in our program playing games, attending events or simply hanging out. I too had many visits to their family home or together we would do things in the community. I also had the privilege of supporting Anne when her first child was born and attended important events like christenings and birthday parties with her and her family. Anne's family and I helped her move into her first apartment and we were available for support in navigating this important transition. I knew that the involvement of Anne's family mattered and I believe Anne felt more

CYC-Online
e-journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)

March 2019
ISSN 1605-7406

support and accountability because her family and I were on the same page.

However, one significant family member who lived in another province was not involved, but as is often the case, she still impacted Anne's thoughts, emotions and choices. So, we talked about her and when Anne was ready, she made contact. These interactions were emotional and sometimes challenging but Anne was able to express long held hurts and process through them. This proved to be a healthy and positive transition. I learned that youth work needs to include family even when the family member(s) cannot literally be in the picture (as can happen with death, distance, court orders or incarceration). The absence, if not acknowledged, can be very detrimental but the inclusion can create space for healing. Although I had minimally engaged with families in previous roles, working with Anne and her family with intention and purpose was new for me. I began to question all I knew about child and youth care and because of this experience; I pursued a graduate degree in family support. Now family informs all of my work.

Second, create individualized experiences. Far too often, I hear people say that we should treat all youth in a program the same. I disagree. In order to make meaningful connections and develop genuine relationships, we need to dedicate time and attention to the individual. Otherwise, how else can the interactions be genuine? How can a youth feel important and special? Anne and I did many fun things together. We spent a lot of time in the kitchen and she gradually gained confidence in cooking, but only after much experimentation, epic failures, and laughter. I was thrilled to have a delicious meal of spaghetti at her apartment, with a sauce that I taught her to make! I introduced Anne to live theatre and helped her register for her first dance class. We learned a lot about one another through these interactions and activities. I am always excited to hear that Anne is

spending the day at the beach with her children, collecting beach rocks and then going home to paint them. She is a wonderful mother and is consciously creating those special moments for her family. But all interactions were not about fun and activity. We also devoted one-to-one time to work on goals, have tough conversations, and to process her fears. I know these conversations were possible because Anne felt safe and supported in our relationship. I was able to be honest with her when I was disappointed or frustrated by her choices. At the same time, I could celebrate her successes. Our relationship had space for both.

Third, let youth lead and walk alongside them when they change direction. Anne is very smart but she often doubted this. When we met, Anne was not registered in an education program. I wanted her to complete her high school diploma and I worked very hard to make this happen. With some trepidation, Anne registered in a grade-equivalent degree program but soon after decided she could not do it. I was disappointed and we talked about this but the reality is that she was just not ready. I supported her decision. But I also did much reflecting and apologized if I had pushed her too hard. A few years ago, Anne registered for her grade-equivalent degree and she is now a college graduate. I like to think some of the early seeds we planted together helped her feel confident to try again. But the goal and the decision to follow through had to be hers, not mine. An important lesson for sure.

Fourth, always give youth credit when they make positive choices. Anne had struggled through much of her adolescence and made several questionable decisions. Some of which resulted in dire consequences. I met her when she was almost eighteen, at a time in her life, when she was ready to make significant changes. These changes were not easy and in order to successfully move forward, Anne decided that she had to sever

most of her friendships. In essence, she had to recreate a social network. It was an isolating and lonely process, but she stayed the course.

I know my relationship with Anne was meaningful and helpful but she made the choice to change and she has followed through. What I noticed during this time was that I received much praise from my work with Anne (and this was nice to hear), but her efforts were rarely mentioned. I also noticed that when Anne struggled, more emphasis was placed on her. I often pointed out this discrepancy. Professionals need to stop taking credit when things go right and blaming youth when things go wrong. Instead, we should praise the youth for their efforts and when they struggle, consider what we can do differently.

Fifth, if it feels right for both of you, maintain connection after the 'job' ends. This sounds simple, but it is actually very complex. It comes back to my earlier point about transparency and honesty. I worked for an organization that understood that caring for youth (and families) does not stop when a youth turns eighteen or when the funding runs out. My supervisor trusted my judgment, but also expected open communication, reflection and debriefing.

Every interaction I had with Anne and her family was thoroughly processed with my team. Anne always knew this as well. When we wanted to do something out of the ordinary, which we did a lot, it was analyzed from multiple angles. For example, Anne asked me to be a bridesmaid. I was delighted to be asked but could not accept without first discussing it with my supervisor. Without getting into the particulars, we decided that it made much sense for me to accept her invitation, but we also set some parameters around my role. Our boundaries were fluid but they were always clear. Anne and I remained connected over the years because that is what Anne wanted. Of course, I wanted this too, but I did not take the lead on continuing our relationship. She did. Now that we are both adults,

and have known one another for almost twenty years, communication is more reciprocal. I have worked with many youth and families but have only maintained a connection with a few. There are many that I wonder about but have not heard from since we worked together. That is okay because I trust that our relationship, although brief, still holds meaning and purpose.

I carry these lessons into each and every interaction I have in my life. They have not only helped me a better child and youth care worker and educator, they have made me a better person. When I asked if there were other things that she hoped I learned from her, Anne added one: “I hope that I taught you that people can change. People can do bad things but they can change their life around when their desire to do so is greater than their impulse to do wrong”. Indeed dear friend. Indeed. You taught me to remain hopeful. You reminded me that every person deserves love, care and compassion. I am privileged to know you and proud of all you have accomplished in your life.

It Just doesn't Get Any Better Than This!

Andy Leggett

From my very first experience on my very first shift as a twenty-year old Child Care Worker getting whacked in the nose with a bed board by an upset young man who apparently did not agree with the "shift supervisor" that he should spend the day in his room and that "the new guy" was just the person to ensure that happened.

To over forty years later, as a 60-some year old Child and Youth Care Worker, who, just last month was eerily STILL standing in the bedroom doorway of an upset young man, this time in a foster home, while he was "tongue-spitting" in my face repeating " You wanna piece of me, punk!... You wanna piece of me, punk!"

So, faced with so many children and youth who have been my teachers and heroes over the years, I decided to "just let my mind drift" (can anyone else immediately see the flaws in this thinking and where this is going?) and write about the first youth that 'popped into my mind".

Sooo ...

I met Kyle less than two years into my career as a CYC. I was approached by a local child welfare agency to see if I would be interested in doing some "work" with a teen boy. I was told that I had developed a "reputation" for being able to work with "challenging" teens and I was just "the man for the job". Roughly translated, this meant I was young (translation: "cheap"), had biceps and a pulse, and word had gotten around that there was this young guy working at the detention center that took a

CYC-Online
e-journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)

March 2019
ISSN 1605-7406

two-by-four to the nose, and not only didn't instantly quit, but was dedicated (translation: "stupid") enough to finish his shift. Fortunately, the idea of vicarious trauma didn't exist then. Otherwise, I'd be a mess!

Kyle was one of those youth that had been diagnosed with "everything', or what I have lovingly come to describe as "D.A.S.", or "Diagnostic Alphabet Soup". Kyle had experienced over thirty placements, including "at least" (apparently, they can lose track of these things) two adoption breakdowns and was described as having some "significant attachment issues". He was then in the process of being considered for another adoption but the process 'wasn't going as well as hoped" and he was close to breaking down this foster placement.

Yikes!

Fortunately (or perhaps unfortunately, depending on your perspective) I was too young and inexperienced to realize: (1) how truly messed up the thinking and planning was in this situation and (2) how common the messed up thinking and planning was in these situations.

My orientation went something like "he doesn't like to do anything, wear clothes you don't mind getting ripped up, get your invoice in every second Tuesday, and your physical restraint reports in within 24 hours."

On the first day working with Kyle, I approached the front door of the foster home where Kyle lived with absolutely no idea of what I was going to do for the afternoon.

As I stood at the front door, I recall hearing Kyle screaming at his foster parents "I am not going to spend one fucking minute with another fucking lame worker!"

Marching bravely on, I knocked on the front door only to have Kyle greet me with a big smile, a handshake, and a "Hi, I'm Kyle".

Despite the profane foreshadowing, Kyle happily agreed to come with me "as long as we got poutine".

So, off we went to a local chip truck.

And, once Kyle had his poutine, clearly my usefulness to him was done. So he announced “Ok, Hotshot, what are you gonna do that everyone else hasn’t tried?”

A really good question.

Still having no idea what I was supposed to or going to do, I recalled the advice of my first mentor who said “when something isn’t working, do something different.”

So, I summoned all the knowledge and experience I had gained in my two years of restraining “out of control youth” (Still one of my favourite terms! The youth were seldom out of control – it was us who were) in a detention center and group home (that literally was my job) and replied… “Anything you want!”

Three of the most profound words I said in my work with children, youth, and families…ever!

Over the next couple of months, Kyle and I negotiated, with a few profanity-laced bumps in the road (and sometimes Kyle even swore), what our days would look like together. And it turned out that he did like doing things, just not the things that people told him to like, “like fucking bowling!”

We would start by going to the local “Beyond the Blue Box” where Kyle would happily look through ALL the items, readily identifying what had been sold that week and what was “new merchandise”.

We would then play a couple of games of pool at the pool hall where he hadn’t been allowed to go anymore because according to Kyle, “I got angry there once.” And then off to the local Radio Shack where he would browse, looking at virtually every item in the store and proudly tell me what each item was and what it did.

Between stops, Kyle got to be in control of the car stereo and old-time country could be heard blasting from the car radio with Kyle singing along (he had a voice like a rusty hinge but he got a "ten" for enthusiasm). We would end each day going to a different chip truck looking for the best poutine in the area.

Some days, Kyle would hardly say a word all day. Other days, I couldn't get a word in edge-wise.

One day, after about three months, our day had come to an end. We were sitting in my car in the middle of nowhere at Kyle's favourite spot, a forest reserve just outside of town ("it was 'special' quiet there!"), rain POURING down, pitch black, Kyle's favourite George Jones CD blasting, eating Poutine. Not another person within kilometers ("Just the way I like it"' Kyle would say). We hadn't said a word in quite a while. Kyle turned to me and said, "Hot Shot (which had become my nickname), It just doesn't get any better than this! Thanks for 'getting me.'"

And from that day forward, something significant and important in my work as a CYC happened. I wasn't sure then what it was, or what to call it, but I knew I wanted to understand it better.

So I began to read more. I began to go to conferences and look for people who talked about this way of "being with youth", stalk them mercilessly, find out what THEY did and said, and then do and say what they did and said.

I didn't realize that, in my work with Kyle, I had stumbled blindly into working with youth relationally.

Out of desperation and ignorance, I stumbled onto using many of the "characteristics of relational child and youth care" that have now become a foundational piece of "who I am" as a Child and Youth Care practitioner: Meeting them where they are at, hanging out, hanging in, Needs-based focus, doing "with not to and for", working in the now, being in relationship, flexibility and individuality, purposeful use of activities, and, yes, love, among others.

Kyle and I stopped hanging out after a year or so. He was making a few friends, had a girl-friend, and, as he put it, "Frankly, Hot Shot, hanging out with you is...well... kind of lame and embarrassing... and you suck at pool!"

His foster parents, who were the real "unsung" heroes of this story, did "hang in" with him even after the adoption broke down and he is doing "OK". We still get together for an occasional poutine.

To this day, I can't pass a chip truck, or Radio Shack, without thinking about him. Thanks, Kyle... and I still suck at pool!

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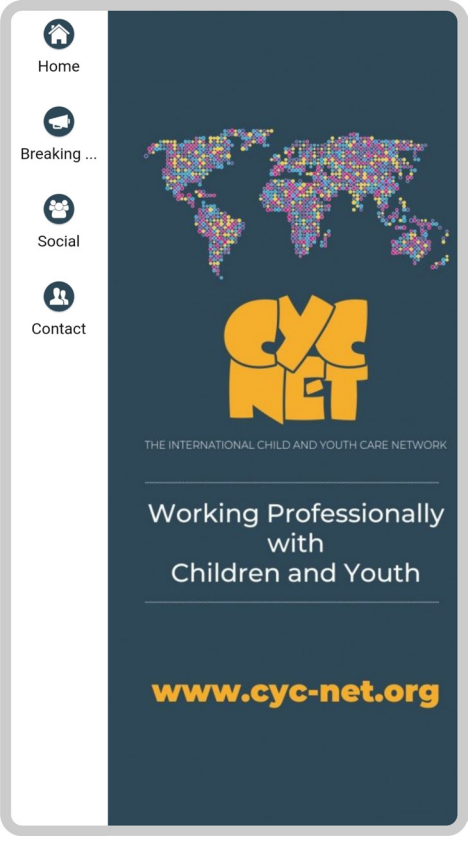

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Brendan

Mark Smith

Brendan was not necessarily the kid I have been closest to over the course of my career but is the one whose ghost flits into my consciousness perhaps more than that of any other. But it is not just me he has left an impression on. My current writing project is a book about the stories of boys whose care I was involved in when I worked in a residential school over the course of the 1980s. And all of the boys remember Brendan fondly. He was the kind of kid who made memories. He was from one of the peripheral housing schemes in Edinburgh located near to the countryside and was what some of the more disparaging discourse on youth might call a feral child – basically, he did his own thing, often surviving pretty close to nature, a bit of a force of nature in fact. This had its upside – on outdoor education trips, he could point out a grey heron before I even knew there was such a bird.

Brendan was pretty rough around the edges. Knives and forks weren't really his thing and he didn't pay too much attention to the finer points of dressing, like wearing underwear consistently. I remember a football trip when, after showering, he hadn't packed anything to change into and threw on an old pair of trousers. It was just around the time that new cars were built with remote locking which you could activate with a key button. One of my colleagues had just got such a new car and, as Brendan walked by, he would press the key mechanism so as the indicator lights would flash, convincing Brendan that this was an underpant detector which was

activated because Brendan wasn't wearing any. That was in the days when you could still have such laughs!

As I say, Brendan was into nature and he asked me if he could build a dovecot in the cottage garden so as he could keep pigeons. I agreed and he set about constructing this ramshackle edifice and began populating it. Now, there are arcane politics and protocols to pigeon keeping and part of what it involves is attracting other fanciers' best fliers through setting up decoys. Brendan started to attract some very fine looking 'doos' prompting some anxiety on my part that we might get a visit from some aggrieved owner. Thankfully, that didn't happen. But, there was the time when a colleague, he of the fancy new car, walked into the dining room carrying a silver platter. "What's that" said Brendan? "It's pigeon", said my colleague. And, indeed it was – all nicely prepared by the chef. Brendan went running out to his doocot only to find that his prize doo was missing. One of the other lads and I had taken it and hidden it. Brendan erupted but then fell about laughing once he realised what was going on. Brendan's pigeons have gone down in the folklore of the school.

Brendan also knew about fish. One year we were on a cycle trip and the boys wanted to go fishing with handlines off the local pier. "A fiver for anyone who catches a kipper" said my colleague – yes the same one, who is beginning to feature rather regularly in these tales. Brendan sidled up to him, "You can't catch a kipper," he said, "it's a smoked herring." "Of course you can catch a kipper", my colleague replied and I was duly sent into the town to buy a kipper. I couldn't source a real one but there were plenty of candy ones so I bought one of these and one of the boys was sent under the pier to attach it to Brendan's line – and to win him the fiver, if it was ever paid! - another glorious memory of residential child care in a world we have lost.

I moved on to another school after a year or so and Brendan left St Joseph's a while later. I had heard he wasn't doing too well. Then, a number of years ago now, I was walking along a street near my home. It was dark. I noticed three young adults walking in the opposite direction. I didn't pay much heed until they walked past and one shouted out my name. As is often the case when boys become adults, I didn't immediately recognise him. "It's me, Brendan," he said. I, as do all other residential workers know, wondered what he might have to say and whether he might have a bone to pick with me over his past care. Brendan and I had had our moments when he was growing up. He had a temper, which continued with him into his adult life and led to him spending time in the jail.

I remember one incident where I was organising a football tournament and Brendan took the huff over something and started to mouth at me. I turned, angrily, to remonstrate with him and he stepped back, falling over a bag in the changing room and hitting his head off a bench. We just about patched things up but that evening I got a phone call from the night man saying Brendan was unwell and had to be taken to hospital with concussion. I passed one of the worst nights of my life hoping that he was OK, my career passing in front of me. I was on the early shift the following morning and I went to get Brendan up with some trepidation. Before he was hardly awake, I began apologising to him but he just looked up with a beaming smile and said he was fine and there was no problem. He was a good kid and he had a bit of dignity and decency about him. Nowadays, this incident would have sparked an inquiry and a whole trail of destruction.

As we stood that evening, talking of days that were gone, I recall, vividly, Brendan saying that his time in St Joseph's were the best days of his life and how he wished he could turn the clock back for just a moment. We said our farewells that evening promising that we would meet up again.

But we never did. I heard a few months later that he had ended up back in prison and had died there. This isn't a story with a happy ending.

Now Brendan might be identified as just another casualty of the care system. It is easy to make a lazy assumption about linkage, even to assume causality in respect of progression from residential school to prison and early death. But that stark statistical conclusion would invalidate Brendan's account of his time in St Joseph's being the best days of his life; the dominant story of abuse and poor outcomes is not the story he would tell, even if what happened to him was the ultimate poor outcome.

This last encounter with Brendan left me with a niggling sense of needing to honour something of his story and my current book owes something to this debt I feel. In a context where the grand narrative of residential schools is one of, at best, emotional austerity and of assumed physical and sexual abuse, Brendan's phrase, "the best years of my life", one, incidentally, that is consistently replicated in interviews conducted for the book, perhaps makes this grand narrative stutter somewhat. Although Brendan can only play a cameo role in the book, his ghost passes it; in fact, if I can persuade the publisher, the book will be called 'The best days of my life'.

Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

Volume 31 Issue 4 / 2018

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ISSN 2410-2954

The CYC-Net PRESS
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Dave

Ben Anderson-Nathe

Early in my career, I worked in a co-ed residential program that housed 12 young people between the ages of 12 and 17. Kids came to the facility for a variety of reasons. Some were there in 5 to 10 day beds, really just a stopgap measure for young people who were on the run, who were in protective custody due to family violence, or simply between foster placements – casualties of overworked caseworkers and a strained system. We also had a few beds for young people who hadn't had the best experiences in care and whom the state said needed "assessment" to decide on a plan for future placements; this assessment period could be up to three months. Then we had just a couple beds for youth whose caseworkers just didn't know what else to do; these kids were placed with us for up to six months at a time (one resident was approaching his third six-month stay when I started).

This configuration led to a dynamic and often confusing home environment for young people. The age range between our youngest and oldest residents was often stressful; older kids got annoyed with youngers, and the younger children alternatively idolized and pushed the buttons of the older residents. Gender dynamics were on full display in the house as well, with boys and girls both performing their genders in all the most prescribed and predictable ways. All the youth were assumed to be straight, which led to boys being expected to perform for girls and vice versa, and anyone who blurred gendered expectations at all became a target for the social policing of the other youth (and, admittedly, too often

the staff as well). The reasons youth came into the facility also got complicated; the young person in our care for five days because he ran away from home, but whose family wanted to reconcile and was willing to do the work to see it happen lived in the same room as the youth whose dad had beaten him the night before with a baseball bat. They shared the breakfast table with a young person who had lived in fifteen foster homes and would likely age out of care before ever leaving our house. And all were held to basically the same expectations of conduct, the same rules, the same restrictions.

Although I didn't know it at the time in the way I know it now, the program had some fatal flaws. It was also one of the most affirming places I'd ever met, one of the best jobs I've ever had (even today), and a site where some really important relational work managed to get done. Nevertheless, it was a pressure cooker.

I remember one day, in the mid 1990s, when the pressure got to be too much for one young person. Dave came into the program with a bit of a reputation behind him. Referred for a 90-day placement assessment, he came to us from the juvenile corrections system, carrying multiple felonies and all the outrage of having lived in that system for the past year and a half. I remember when his parole officer first dropped him off on our porch; he walked across the small backyard parking lot of the split level midcentury home wearing a crisp plain white T-shirt, a gold chain around his neck, and sagging his blue Dickies almost to his knees. He sat in silence while my colleague walked him through our intake process, silence that continued for the better part of his first few days.

Dave also made it clear to me pretty early on that he didn't like me. I'm not proud to say the feeling was pretty mutual. Actually, that's not totally clear. I didn't dislike Dave. His swagger, his confidence and bravado, the way he spoke about female residents, it all added up to a performance of

masculinity that freaked me out. In many ways, Dave was the kid who used to threaten me when I was his age. He was the kid who called me "faggot," who followed me to my car with baseball bats. It's not that I disliked him. I was afraid of him.

On some level, I think he knew that. I think he was aware of the effect he had on me, as much as I tried to conceal it and be present in the ways I knew I wanted – probably needed – to be. I know with certainty that he got something out of antagonizing me. He called me "fag" under his breath when we passed each other in the living room. He spent entire meals staring daggers at me across the kitchen table.

I couldn't figure it out. I wasn't the best residential counselor in the world. I was still relatively new. I was only a few years older than our oldest residents. I was definitely navigating the contours of the job, trying to figure out the dance between me and the young people, staying in balance with them on the teeter-totter, give-and-take of relational practice. And most of the time, I was pretty effective. While not the best, I had a good track record with most of the young people in the house. I could joke with them, dishing out and taking the teasing and ribbing that characterized an emotionally safe recognition that they mattered to me and I to them. But not with Dave. Dave was a puzzle I couldn't figure out, probably at least in part because I was afraid of what picture would emerge when the puzzle was finished.

Then one midsummer day, on a swing shift, I was assigned dinner prep, and the jobs wheel spun around to land on Dave as Meal Prep Assistant. Neither of us was thrilled, I remember that. When the time came, we went to the kitchen to start prepping burgers for the grill. It was the kind of kitchen you often see in residential care: the kitchen sink looked out over the back yard for supervision, the knives were locked up in a secure cabinet, the oversized industrial fridge sat off to one side, and a giant

kitchen island provided both work space and physical distance between us.

With my back turned to the island, I stared out the kitchen window as I began rolling hamburger into patties. Veggies and a massive block of cheese sat on the island behind me, waiting for Dave to slice them up. It got quiet behind me, and then I heard Dave ask me, "So. Are you a faggot?"

I turned and saw this young man, still in the pressed white shirt and crisp Dickies, this time holding a butcher knife pointed toward me as he leaned across the island.

"What?" My heart pounded. I'm sure I started sweating. I realized I didn't know where my co-workers or the other youth were.

"I said, are you fucking gay." A statement, not a question.What do I say to that? When I try to remember the moment, I remember seeing him, seeing his face. I remember having no idea what to say. When I think critically about that moment, somehow from outside myself, I see a context. It was the 1990s. Queer politics and visibility weren't then what they are today; only three years earlier, legislative measures were on the ballot to ban queer people from certain sectors of employment, particularly those with proximity to children and youth, for fear we'd contaminate them or, worse, recruit them. I wasn't out to youth I worked with; I honestly didn't know how to be. As I mentioned, I was only a few years older than the residents. It had only been three or four years since these kinds of interrogations – and their threats of violence – had been the day-to-day norm in my high school. And yet, I was no longer that vulnerable young person (except wasn't I?). I was the adult. I was the youth worker. I was the person who's supposed to respond.

"Dave, put down the knife. You don't want to do this." Voice shaking: is this the right thing to say? Am I sure he doesn't want to? Should I just answer?

"You don't know me, man. You don't know what I do or don't want to do. Answer my fucking question!"

What do I say? Do I answer him? Do I lie? "Dave, seriously. I'm not worth this. If this goes the way it might, it's back to prison. You don't want that." A safe answer. Redirection.

SLAM! "Tell me!" Five-pound block of cheese clutched in one hand, slammed down on the island. Knife still in the other hand. I hear someone approaching the kitchen from the staff office.

"I'm not gonna do that. You can make me be whatever you need me to be. If you need me to be gay, I'm gay. If you need me to be straight, I'm straight. But you need to put down the knife. You don't want this."

Shaking, both of us. Staring each other down, me attempting calm compassion. Both of us barely holding it together.

Vanessa, Dave's primary counselor and most vocal champion in the house, finally came into the kitchen. I remember her turning the corner, seeing the curls of her gigantic hair before I even saw her. I remember Dave seeing her, putting the knife gently on the island, walking away with her. I don't remember anything after that. I must have gone back to the staff office. I'm sure there was an incident report. I know I chose not to file a police report, chose not to send this young man back to prison on a parole violation. I remember almost nothing else except that Dave wouldn't speak to me for the rest of his last several days in the house.

Dave came back to the house about a year later. His parole was over. He'd moved into a foster home where he was doing well, with people he was coming to care deeply about. Apparently, he still wore his uniform white shirt and blue Dickies. But there were no knives this time.

I actually didn't see him. I think he was there for just a weekend while his foster parents could have some respite time. Vanessa told me after the fact that he asked about me all weekend. Said he wanted to apologize to

me for the kitchen and to explain himself. Over the course of the year, Dave had come out. He now identified as bisexual. He cried when he told Vanessa how bad he felt for having taken out his fear of sexuality on me. She told him, basically, that we're good. We're fine. He didn't need to worry about it anymore. I would understand.

And I think I did. I think I do now, at least. When I was asked to write a story about a young person who changed my life, Dave came to mind immediately. It's not just that I often tell this story when I teach. It's that Dave taught me a lot. He taught me that my job would sometimes be scary, which paradoxically has helped me to very seldom actually be afraid of young people I've worked with. But even more, he taught me that as youth workers, we have no idea who – what – we really are in the lives of the young people we encounter. For Dave, I carried some huge but unnamed symbolism. I carried the responsibility to hold his pain, to be the target of his anger, regardless whether I knew what it was about or where it came from. Dave taught me that relational practice doesn't always mean all the warm, fuzzy things we often talk about it meaning. It's not all moments of connection and insight. Sometimes the relationship becomes a canvas for a much more disturbing and painful painting, all sharp angles and angry colors. And maybe the piece I carry the most from my short relationship with Dave: he brought home for me that the moment in front of me (or between you and me, here, right now) is just one moment. It is partial, it is impermanent, and it is powerful. But it's just one moment.

It's been more than 20 years since I've seen Dave. Wherever he is, he's now in his late 30s. He has a life, has had a life. That moment at the kitchen island is just one moment among countless others. If he remembers me, or that moment, at all, I hope the memories bring him no pain. I am grateful to him, and I wish I could say that. I wish him well.

A Story for Grant

Thom Garfat

I was a full-blooded Caucasian. She was Cree of Northern Quebec. I did not know the importance of that distinction.

I got a call, late in the evening, saying there was a young teenage woman incarcerated in a full lock-down French facility and that she belonged in the English network (because she spoke no French) – in one of my programs. The call told me she 'belonged' to us and someone was expected to come get her.

I decided to go myself to see what was up.

I went to the French incarceration centre and, after walking through many manned and secure doors, I finally arrived at a locked cell and the accompanying worker said to me "She is in there. She may be dangerous. Are you sure you want to go in?"Like, what was my choice – go in or abandon her there? So, I entered to meet her.

My guide unlocked the door, I stepped in and the door closed, and locked, behind me. The room was maybe 8 by 10 - and she was sitting at a table in the middle of the room. I thought about everything I had learned – do not let the 'client' be between you and the door, search for weapons, be on guard. Be paranoid.

I entered the room and looked at her – we caught each other's eye. I nodded.

I walked past her to the small window. She was now between me and the door – contrary to everything I had been taught. But I wanted her to feel safer than me.

CYC-Online
e-journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)

March 2019
ISSN 1605-7406

"I thought you had to stand between me and the door" she said.

"Yah. I am supposed to." I responded.

"So why aren't you?" she asked.

I thought about that for a minute, not really knowing. "I guess I wanted to let you have more control and power given you are locked up here. I hope that wasn't a mistake."

Why had I decided to do this? Make myself more vulnerable. Truth is, I was not feeling physically threatened. I had, I believed, enough training to deal with whatever attack she might present. But I wanted her to know I did not think of her as a threat – just as a person in pain. But, somehow it was more than that. She was a Cree from Northern Quebec and my experience told me that normally they were not aggressive.

At that moment, for whatever reason, I decided I was tired of all my training, preparation, paranoia. For whatever reason, at this moment with this young person, I was tired of the bullshit – the bullshit that objectified young people, made them into 'other' and made them into threats. For whatever reason, I decided that it was time to treat people as people. Threat or not.

Somewhere between the unlocking of the first door, and the final entrance to her cell, I decided this was a terrible way to work with young people – I had decided that if there was any hope, it lay in the area of relationship – trusting relationship. Trust the person, not the door locks. Okay. It was not my normal way, but it was my evolving way. My training in action, although I did not realise it then.

"This seems really screwed up," I said as I looked out the window. "You are a young woman locked up here with no freedom. What gives?" I was quite curious as I had not read the intake forms.

Well, you know what we could expect, eh? “They are a bunch of assholes, the system sucks, etc., etc.” But that is not what she said. Instead she looked at me – hard and direct, and said “They do not understand me.”

It took me a second – or maybe three – to gather my thoughts. “Of course, they do not understand you”, I said. “You are a young Cree woman from Northern Quebec and they are traditional Quebec French Canadians. You come from different worlds.”

Who knows where the hell that came from – me being a classic English immigrant to Quebec – but came it did.

“And you think you understand me? You, an old southern white guy?”

And then a light went off.

Because I had worked in her community a few times and because I had worked with adolescents, I *did* think I was able to know her.

But her question, for whatever reason, drove home and I realized that I could never, ever, know anything about a young person before I met them. I had assumed I knew something and realized I knew nothing.

Great learning!

Power Is Naturally Fearful

Jack Phelan

She was small for her age, appearing to be about 10 rather than her actual 12 years. She almost looked frail, but a closer inspection noted how strongly her eyes looked out at the world. She arrived at the residential program with a bad reputation, and many of the staff were anxious about her potential effect on the other youth.

I happened to be working at this Child and Youth Care agency for a few months because I was able to arrange a release from my faculty duties to re-experience front line practice. I was the co-chair in a Child and Youth Care diploma program and my colleague had the excellent idea to ask for release time for both of us, in different semesters, to go back to direct practice for several months. We merely had to agree to be fully responsible for the program while the other person was gone. Personal learning was the goal and this article will describe a big lesson.

I was immediately curious about this young girl and was also attracted to the challenge she seemed to present. I have always been energized by aggressive teens, since to me they have lots of power which can be used to create all kinds of good things.

Her case file "facts" included that her mother was an alcoholic who was not able to supervise her, she was engaging in prostitution and possibly drug use, and she spent a lot of time on the streets. The Child and Youth Care staff were afraid that she would glorify street life with the other youth and somehow infect them with bad values. Part of her initial treatment

plan was to isolate her when possible so she had minimal contact with the rest of the young people in the program.

I got to spend a lot of one on one time with her, since I was an extra staff most days and it was convenient for everyone. I focused on supporting her to feel powerful and capable, mostly through activities, but also doing schoolwork at times. We got along well together and I found her to be quite open and insightful about herself. She described her mother as being totally defeated by her addiction to alcohol and because of that she had to assume parenting duties for herself and her younger brother, who was 6 years old. Her mother often had no money for food and so this young girl began to engage in prostitution to raise money to feed herself and her brother. She very matter of factually related to me that men would pay more for her because she looked so young, and often lied about her age, saying she was younger. Her manner when telling me this was very straightforward and unemotional, just another interesting part of her experiences. She was picked up by the police and ended up in residential services because of her activities, and she was very concerned about her brother while she was in care.

Her immediate fear was that the social worker would place her brother in a foster home, once the home situation was understood, and this was totally unacceptable. She described running away from her previous placement every other Thursday afternoon to intercept her mother's welfare check before it all went to alcohol, buying enough food for her brother before the money was gone. When she returned to her placement she told them that she had run away to use drugs, since did not want to expose her brother's vulnerable situation. She said that she was surprised how no one ever questioned this account and it was an easy way to hide her real purpose. Her goal was to get back home as quickly as possible, since she needed to protect her brother.

She was a very bright girl, but had not attended school regularly, so she was not seen as a strong student. In February she asked her social worker what she needed to do to get to go home by June. The social worker told her that she could go home if she passed all her courses in school. The girl happily agreed to this and focused her energy on catching up with what she had missed.

At the end of April, the social worker met with her team and unhappily reported that it appeared to be possible that the girl would do very well in school, and yet the social worker was not able to engage with the mother to create the needed situation at home, so she was going to announce at the next day's treatment conference (in the girl's presence) that she would be sending her to a foster home. The Child and Youth Care team protested and felt this was quite unfair, but reluctantly agreed to support this, feeling powerless to do anything about it (other than to complain about social workers after the meeting).

The next day we were all at the meeting, anxiously anticipating a very angry response from the girl. When the social worker announced her new plan, there was no visible response from the girl. Near the end of the meeting, as was customary, the girl was asked if there was anything she wanted to say. She said "yes, there is", she then turned to the clerical person who was taking minutes and said, "I want you to write this down, if I do not go home in June, I intend to kill myself. Can you spell suicide?" The clerk nervously looked at the social worker who shook her head no. The social worker then announced that the meeting was adjourned.

The following week the meeting was re-convened and the social worker reported that she was finally able to meet with the mother and they were working together to reunify the family. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. I finished my assignment at the agency in late April, but returned in early

June to see the girl who smiled and told me that she was going home in two weeks.

Reflecting on power and powerlessness in our work with youth and families has been very useful for me. We often talk about needing to maintain a “one down” or “non-expert stance” in relational practice, supporting people to be the expert on themselves. But we have a great deal of innate power in these relationships, simply by being in the helper role. Unfortunately, power is naturally fearful and we protect ourselves first before allowing any power to be distributed to others. Newer practitioners can be developmentally unsafe, so they have great difficulty sharing control, but more mature practitioners should (must) be willing to reflect on how they are being powerful and openly discuss control dynamics with the youth and families.

This young girl refused to be a victim, even though experiencing many events in her life which could have beaten her down. She forced everyone in that meeting to put her needs first instead of protecting themselves. Professionals who had become comfortable with doing what worked for them had to shift priorities, at least in this example.

I also do not feel very holier-than-thou, because I have been just as guilty in my practice many times when I was a supervisor or frustrated worker. Being in the fortunate position of being a semi-detached adjunct allowed me to be at arms’ length here, but I know that I also need to continually reflect on power and control.

I and several others owe a great debt to this wonderful 12-year-old.

I am the Young Person Who Impacts Me

Hans Skott-Myhre
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In my last column, I referenced Mike Baizerman's writing on how to recognize a youth worker. In it, he reminds us that the courage that we bring to our work is rooted in our own experience of being young. He suggests that whatever we bring to the work, our best work stems from the way we, "live out . . . adolescence in a more or less healthy way, building on the joy and competence [we] experienced." While I am not sure that it is only the healthy, joyful, and competent aspects of our youth that we bring to our work, I would concur that our relational work with young people is driven by an ongoing relationship with our own childhood.

I would suggest that something very important is lost when we relegate our childhood to the past. To take on adulthood, as the defining characteristic of our identity, is to resign ourselves to an encroaching irrelevance to the lives of the young people we encounter in our work. Immersing ourselves in adulthood, as a way of life, consigns us to a gradual aging out of the world of lived experience that is at the heart of Child and Youth Care as a relational practice. It is, in a way, a kind of betrayal of our faith in the young people we encounter. To insist on being an adult is to say that being young is never enough. One must move on to something more. In a quietly arrogant way, it is to assert that the something "more" is represented in us as the adults. Perhaps, it is to suggest, with a moderate

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e-journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)

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degree of narcissism that, as adults, we can guide and mentor young people out of the phase they are in and into "reality."

I would argue that to do CYC/youth work well requires at least a moderate refusal of such ideas. In a way, to be a really good CYC/youth worker requires an inability to "grow up." Of course, the fact that some of the best workers are "immature" can create a kind of tension in our field. On the one hand, there is the common wisdom that insists that our role is to assist young people in the transition into adulthood. That is, to make them more like us. There is a certain colonial logic to that wisdom that can lead to a kind of assimilationist project that seeks to erase the unruly and subversive aspects of being young. On the other hand, as workers our role is to enter the life world of young people, to be playful and to "meet them where they are at." However, we are supposed to resist any inclination to "go native." We must sustain the boundaries of adulthood and never fully become youth. At one level, we are asked to be missionaries of development, to spread the good word of adulthood as salvation from the "storm and stress" of adolescence. At another level, we are to be youthful but not youth.

These paradoxes are rooted in development as a central defining characteristic of CYC. However, these are not neutral ways of understanding the world, they are rooted in Eurocentric discourses of hierarchy and taxonomy. As Erica Burman (2017) points out in *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*, the notion of development, as applied to the world of young people, is a "socially constituted framework of meaning" that orders our world at multiple levels. It is not simply a natural accounting of phenomenon, but a culturally and socially determined way of describing the structures of living things. As Burman points out, developmental frameworks are powerful deployments of social force that are "often imperceptible, taken for granted features about our

expectations of ourselves, others, parents, children and families, informing the structure of popular and consumer culture as well as technical and official policies" (p. 2). For Child and Youth Care, the adoption of developmental concepts and ideas, as simply a given, can make them seemingly inaccessible to significant critique. They become naturalized and as such begin to permeate all aspects of our lives in powerful ways.

Burman notes that we internalize development as a set of markers by which we determine our "healthy" progress through life. The world of Child and Youth Care is saturated with this logic in our assessments of ourselves, the young people we encounter and their families. The fear of being developmentally outside the norm is a prominent feature of family life, driving parents (and CYC workers) to constantly assess appropriate developmental trajectories into adulthood and beyond. Developmental truths have a profound influence on social policy, legal statutes, the organization of child welfare systems, as well as agency policies and procedures. Because developmental ideas are so influential, it is sometimes hard to remember that they reflect the values of a particular culture and society.

However, the division of our lives into stages that proceed in a linear and progressive fashion towards maturity is only one way to talk about how life proceeds. Developmental theory might well be thought of as possibly limited in the way it describes the differences that emerge over the course of the lifespan. Indeed, it is full of ideas such as individuality, linear progression, preferences for certain neurologies, valorization of some bodies over others, ideas about civilized and primitive social orders, mature and immature behaviors and so on. The prevalence of these kinds of ideas within societies and cultures subject to the spread of western psychology as a universal set of truths, oftentimes overshadows and marginalizes other cultural understandings of the way life moves. For many cultures and

societies around the world, time has not necessarily worked in a linear fashion, the only form of subjectivity was not by default the individual and so on. The imposition of western psychological ideas such as development, as a set of universal truths, is a culturally dubious practice that can have deleterious effects on the ability of workers to engage in cross-cultural relational practice.

Development is not simply problematic culturally, however. A number of feminist scholars, beginning with Carol Gilligan (1993) have critiqued the way that developmental ideas such as those of Piaget and Kohlberg were founded on the study of boys and men. Piaget's notion of the importance of competition and Kohlberg's ideas about the necessity of autonomy run in contradiction to feminist notions of collective care and cooperation. Kathleen Skott-Myhre (2016) describes the way that developmental ideas deeply influenced her definition of herself as a mother. She talks about how she worried about whether or not she was managing the development of her son properly. Her view of who he was, was powerfully inflected by ideas about adolescence as a time of "storm and stress." During the early part of his teen years she began to see him as an adolescent "alien," increasingly different from herself.

Upon reflection, she began to see that perhaps his struggles as a young person and her struggles as a woman negotiating single motherhood were not so different. Both she and her son lived in socially marginalized categories that actually gave them more in common than she had imagined. She notes how the discourses of development divided them in ways that obscured their collective common interests. In her work she suggests that, perhaps we should not see adolescence and youth as a transition into adulthood, but simply a viable alternative social category that need not be age dependent. Perhaps, adults could join with young

people in a less fearful social collaboration of who they are and what they are capable of.

The idea that we are developmentally alien to one another is profoundly problematic. Such an idea can persuade us to see some aspects of our lived experience as merely transitional, rather than having merit on their own account. As K. Skott-Myhre points out, perhaps we needn't see our developmental history as a series of linear passages. Very possibly, it might be advantageous to see our history as contemporaneous with our present lives. That is to say, who we have been and what we have experienced doesn't just influence our current idea of who we are, it is an active part of who we are becoming.

Deleuze and Guattari propose that our process of becoming cannot be partitioned into chunks of linear time. They suggest that nothing we have ever been can be separated from who are currently are. We are a composition of all the experiences we have had and those experiences continue to resonate, not as elements of a bygone past, but as constituent components of who we are now. There isn't a material actuality to terms such as childhood, adolescence, pre-teen, tween, adultescent and so on. These are social categories that overcode the lived experience of the body. The body only has one time and that is the time of now. Our material experience of the world occurs only in this moment, but this moment is also composed of everything the body has experienced throughout its duration. In this sense, there is no linear development of the body or of who are becoming. It is more of an ongoing composition of experiential components always happening in the current moment.

Deleuze and Guattari refer to this as the becoming child of all ages. For them the child is not a developmentally category. Instead, it is a way of talking about the kind of unbridled creative capacity that we all share prior to being socialized. It the fundamental capacity of life as expressed

through the body and the mind before it is turned to the disciplines and controls of a certain social configuration. This raw creative force that they call the child never goes away. Throughout our lifetime, the creative capacity of life is shaped and modified and shapes and modifies our bodies and our minds through our encounters and relations with the world. For Deleuze and Guattari, this is not a neat and tidy progression through stages of development. Each body is radically unique in the ways it is composed by random collisions with the world in which it is embedded. We do not progress, we are composed. There are no stages, there is only our state of becoming. We are happening now – always. We are not universal categories – we are idiosyncratic becomings. We are not individuals – we are transit points for living expression.

Of course, that may all sound a bit obscure, perhaps even mystical. From my perspective it is neither. But let me see if I can bring it all back around to Child and Youth Care and the young person who impacts me. The idea that I don't leave a certain aspect of my life behind me opens the possibility to think of myself as a collective. I am not a series of stages, but a composition of everything I have been. Society would have me believe that at my age I am a senior who had passed through childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age and so on. In that version of me, I am relatively alien to young people and can't really relate to them because I have passed beyond those stages of life. I am no longer a child, youth, middle aged and so forth. I am supposedly more mature, wise and so on. If I put those ideas aside, then I begin to see that I am not so different from people who have spent less years on the planet. The perceived differences that create young people and elders as alien to one another are largely socially constructed.

Now, just because something is socially constructed, does not mean it has no effects. It has very real effects on how I see myself and how I am

seen. In this respect, age and development have effects very similar to gender, race, sexuality, and class. Like these categories, the power differentials generated by developmental constructs have deep and sometimes traumatic impacts on designated subjects. The effects of developmental ideas create hierarchies of age that divide us and make it difficult to engage comfortably with one another. They give us the idea that we can define each other in ways that are constraining and isolating. While we are all different, social categories simultaneously obscure our actual difference as unique creative capacity, while emphasizing differences based on abstract universal categories. It is our actual material differences that we share and that allow us to impact each other relationally.

Perhaps, one of the most egregious effects of developmental ideas is the way they divide us against ourselves. We are put in the position of denying our childishness if we are to mature, to abandoning our adolescent explorations, if we are to be an adult. We are asked to put our lived experience of different stages we have "passed through" into our history. They are relegated to memory and often only revisited to uncover childhood trauma or for the purposes of nostalgic reverie. I would argue that this is a truly unfortunate loss of an important element of who we are now. All that I am and have been is now. Finally, it is this respect that I can say that I am the young person who impacts me the most.

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The Moment Lola Changed Everything

Kiaras Gharabaghi

"Sure", I said, when my friend Grant asked me to contribute a story 'about the young person who changed me'. How hard can it possibly be to tell the story about...; damn, about who? My lighthearted and unthinking agreement to participate in this special issue came to haunt me in ways I did not anticipate. In the days after agreeing to write a story, the names and faces of dozens of young people danced in front of me. I could write about Brian, who I had met on my first day ever working in a residential program; he has preoccupied my mind ever since, because on our first day together, he presented himself as a tough, smart talking, 'don't care about anything'-kind of kid. That night I found him crying himself quietly to sleep in bed, which I learned is what he did every night, longing for his family back in Newfoundland. Or I could write about John, the young guy I met in a residential treatment program when he was 15 years old, already diagnosed with liver problems due to excessive alcohol consumption. He lived life dangerously, involved in Toronto gangs, heavy drug use, drinking, and always on the wrong side of the law. Notwithstanding the damage he did to the program, the violence he committed against his peers and staff, and his utter disregard for rules, I remained connected with John for fifteen years post-discharge and saw him through multiple jail terms, fatherhood, recoveries and setbacks, as well as the death of his parents. There was Patty, the indigenous young

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e-journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)

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ISSN 1605-7406

woman who wore her heart on her sleeve, and who in spite of major crises that included multiple suicide attempts, drug overdoses, and behavioural meltdowns was perhaps the kindest, most loving, and most thoughtful young person I ever met. Many years later, I was the manager of several group homes in the same region where I had met Patty. One day, I admitted her daughter to one of our group homes, which brought home the issue of multi-generational child welfare involvement. Like her mother, her daughter was beautiful, inside and out. There was William (his real name), who for two years lived in a treatment program I managed before being unceremoniously yanked out of there by his Children's Aid Society social worker and placed in a private group home at considerable distance from his mother and sisters who had been his only source of consistent and unqualified love. He died by restraint in that private group home a few months later at the age of 13, setting off an inquest that forever changed the way physical interventions are regulated in Ontario. Nevertheless, many more kids have died by restraint in Ontario since then.

Jenny, the suicidal young woman trying to recover from sexual abuse-related trauma introduced me to the art of glue-sniffing; Vinnie, the young woman who argued about everything all the time and eventually participated in a ten-day hike I had organized with youth involved in child and youth mental health services, where she demonstrated leadership, integrity, toughness and a degree of helpfulness most of my colleagues have not been able to demonstrate; Sarah, who I initially had met as Peter, and who came out as Trans and went through their gender transformation while living in the youth shelter I managed; they endured a degree of bullying, ridicule and undignified interactions that most humans would not be able to withstand, and yet they maintained the most positive, hopeful and joyous approach to life I have encountered; Little Richard, the 12 year old I met in a brain injury rehab hospital, who was tearing up the place and

driving the nurses crazy. On my first shift with him I was told to never, ever let him out of my eyes. As soon as the nurses withdrew and left me alone with him, I suggested to him we play hide and seek on the hospital grounds. We did, and we were the best of friends after the several hours it took me to find him! There are so many others who I know changed me; I know this because they dance at the forefront of my conscious reflections. Some are dancing to soulful, almost funky music, and I take great pride in their accomplishments in post-secondary education, in raising their own families, in accumulating wealth. Others are dancing a tango, or barely moving to the Blues played by washed up musicians in a smoke-filled Chicago venue. They are holding on after suicide attempts, bouts of deep depression, and loss, loss and more loss. But they all changed me. They changed my view of the world around me, what I care about and what I don't care about, how I am with young people, and even how I say 'hello' to young people when I first meet them. They also changed how I am as a parent and as a friend. And they changed how I listen to young people and what I listen for. I learned more about race and racism, gender identity and sexual orientation, poverty, love, loyalty, friendship, power and the richness of silence than I could ever learn in school. And I am grateful to them all.

I have to say that I no longer like Grant. How dare he ask me to reflect on all of these young people who have made me who I am today? This journey has brought forth joy and pain, regret and pride. My carefree summer has been transformed by the reflections and memories of young people I met over the years. These young people have changed me gradually, incrementally but uni-directionally. They have enhanced my empathy, my capacity to abstain from judgment, and my hope and confidence that good child and youth care practice can save lives, change lives for the better, and promote autonomy in young people that they will carry with them through good and bad. Still, in trying to identify the young person who has changed me, who stands out as

the ONE, the turning point in the way I am today as a professional, as a human being, and as commentator on all things child and youth care, the person who comes to mind is Lola.

I met Lola about 20 years ago in the early evening in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on Barrington Street (the life of Halifax). I would say that she was about 14 at the time, but I don't know for sure. I didn't say a word to Lola, I don't know anything about her, and I have no idea where she is today. But she haunts me, and I can remember her face as if she were standing in front of me right now. A pretty, childlike face, but with a sadness edged into it. Lola said six words to me; in one moment, as I was sitting in my car stopped at a red light. Six words that explain why I often come across (in my writings and in person) as deeply cynical, a little negative, highly critical, and generally suspicious of child and youth services anywhere. These six words have forever created questions in me that rebel against the self-congratulatory tone of the helping professions. And they have taught me, indeed convinced me, that no matter how good our rhetoric might be, covering everything from love and relationship to engagement and evidence-based treatment, it is just rhetoric, distant from the everyday lives lived by young people. It is a collection of words and ideas, careers and entrepreneurial initiatives, narcissism and professional development, that evidently had not yet reached Lola.

About two hours before I met Lola, I had been in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia (just across the harbour dividing the cities of Halifax and Dartmouth) at a job interview with a large, government-mandated child and youth serving agency. The interview started off fairly standard, and I was asked questions about my general perspective on young people facing adversities, my approaches to intervention strategies, my values, my competencies, my growth areas and so on. I had done my research and I knew what the agency valued, and so I gave extensive, well-articulated responses that I knew were blowing the interview

panel away. So much so that they spent a great deal of time and effort explaining to me what they were all about, their great innovations, their commitment to young people, their progressive thinking, and their awesome services. The interview became a bit of a love-in, with both me and the people interviewing me congratulating each other on how good we were. Good in our thinking, good in our commitments, good in our practice. Our conversation (because it really wasn't an interview anymore) covered all of the rhetorical superstars of the helping professions; we talked about love, care, engagement, resilience, positive psychology, trauma (which was quite progressive in those days), family, belonging, identity, positive outcomes, and so much more.

I left the interview emotionally hooked on two core ideas. First, the idea that I had the job locked up. And second, the idea that the world is a good place, where helping professionals who are well trained, competent, committed and progressive were meeting the needs of young people facing myriad adversities. I got into my car, stopped at Tim Hortons (legendary Canadian coffee and donut chain now corrupted by corporate US-based ownership) and picked up a double double (coffee with two sugars and two creams; I have since cut down to two sugars, one cream). My way home took me across the MacDonald Bridge, crossing Halifax Harbour and giving me a beautiful view of the glistening lights from boats on the ocean waters. I looked at the skyline of Halifax, a city full of life and extremely friendly people. In short, I was in a Child & Youth Care mood, that feeling one gets when rejoicing at our professional commitment to love and care, to being with young people in the moment, to making moments meaningful. As I got off the bridge, I took a sharp left onto Barrington Street, a street where bar hopping mixes with prostitution, and where vegan restaurants can be found amidst greasy diners, immortalized by the Canadian pop band The Bare Naked Ladies in their song called 'Hello City'. Approaching a yellow light, I slowed down, feeling in no rush

to try and beat the impending red light. I stopped, window open, arm on the car door, sipping my coffee and feeling great.

Lola came out of nowhere. Suddenly her head was in my car, well past the threshold of where the window would normally rise to close off the car. Her face was perhaps no more than 20 centimeters away from mine. A child on the streets of Halifax, wearing too much make-up poorly applied, blond hair somewhat dishevelled. In one moment, one encounter, one singular sentence uttered, my worldview changed, and I came to realize that the conversation just had, the moments just lived, the joy just experienced, were little more than the manufactured output of the rhetoric machine. That one sentence left me shattered, utterly incompetent as a child and youth care practitioner, and far, far away from the self-assuredness and confidence I had exuded in the interview moments earlier. Lola said loudly, clearly, without hesitation and quite clearly not for the first time on that day: “Do you want to fuck me?”

I have been reflecting on this encounter for 20 years! It has raised questions for me that I realize are inconvenient for the field of child and youth care specifically and for the human services more generally. For example, I wonder what might have been a meaningful response to the question itself. “No, thank you”? “Hey, how about we go for coffee so we can talk about where you are at”? “Does your Mom or your Dad know where you are”? All of these seem inadequate, perhaps risky, and maybe even re-traumatizing, particularly if Lola’s relationship with Mom and/or Dad is problematic. I also wonder why I froze in this encounter. It’s not like I had never heard of child prostitution. And I was on Barrington street, where sex work is common and highly visible. Why was this encounter so utterly unexpected and so completely devastating for me? The encounter clashed with the warmth and self-congratulatory tone of the conversation I had just had with the service provider. Somehow, everything seemed so

easy in that conversation, so clear and so absolutely positive. We had the right approach, the resources, the settings and the knowledge to do something about the challenges faced by young people. We were ready to serve, to meet young people 'where they are at', to be in relationship with young people, to support their healing, their growth and their connection to positive social contexts. Well, actually, we were ready to shine in *our* context, *our* settings, *our* rhetoric. We had nothing at all to offer to Lola's context, Lola's setting, or Lola's story.

Twenty years after this encounter, I have come to believe three things:

First, when we talk about 'meeting young people where they're at', we are really talking about meeting young people where they're at on our turf, in our world, in that which we control.

Second, Lola is the reason why child and youth care practice must always be an approach ('to being in the world', as Garfat likes to say), not a credential, professional badge, or exclusive club. I have some hope that there was, even at that time, someone working in some capacity on the streets of Halifax with the aim of engaging young people like Lola, and providing opportunities for Lola to consider her life differently. That someone probably wasn't called a child and youth care practitioner, probably didn't have child and youth care credentials, and probably had little interest in professionalizing. But their work, I hope, actually went beyond the formal rhetoric of our field and resulted in meeting Lola where she was at, on her turf.

Third, young people live their lives not just in the moment, but also in aesthetic, cultural, racial, gender, labour, language, peer, and other contexts that shape that moment. Sometimes I feel like we have worked hard over the years to give rise to human services, including child and youth care practices, that seek, in a self-serving sort of a way, to simplify the moment to an inter-personal interaction as if none of these contexts existed. This, I think, is a problem.

Postcard from Leon Fulcher

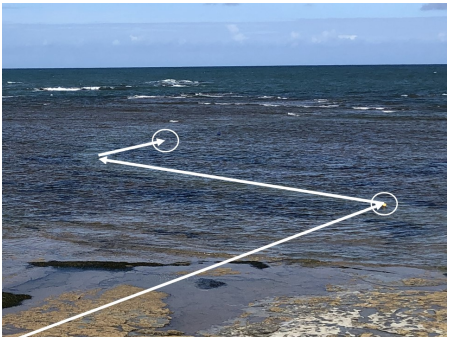
Tatapouri Bay, East Cape – New Zealand

Kia Ora colleagues! You might be interested in a group activity that we experienced recently at Tatapouri Bay, north of Gisborne on the East Cape of New Zealand. We went wild Stingray Feeding as a reef adventure in what was a truly original New Zealand eco-experience. Check out www.divetatapouri.com!

Stingray are known as the children of the Maori sea God Tangaroa. The *tangata whenua* or guardians of these lands and waters are the *Ngati Porou* Iwi, the tribe who claim to be the first to welcome the dawning of each new day from their *Maunga Hikorangi*!

Our pathway onto the reef had been cleared of major obstacles and with our walking

Waka Carving on the Beach of Tatapouri Bay Feeding the Stingrays Tour



Our pathway out onto the Tatapouri reef at low tide with water up to our knees

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ISSN 1605-7406

sticks, it was possible to navigate the uneven rock surface upon which we walked. At the pre-arranged feeding location, we were asked to gather closely and form a wall through which the Stingrays could not pass between our legs, and they tried!.

Each of us was wearing wader trousers. This meant we could move into water at least a metre in depth. There was still a sense of uncertainty as we made our way out over the reef to where the natural feeding place was for the Stingrays. The Kingfish were the first to make themselves known! Amazingly powerful game fish!

Each participant wore wading trousers with boots and carried a walking stick

Risk assessments made it clear that nobody was to put their fingers into the water because the Kingfish would come for them! We could put our fist into the water and that seemed ok, but Kingfish can move like lightning! And they did just that, throughout the Stingray Feeding adventure.

Two big Kingfish made themselves known almost immediately – watch your fingers!

Short Tail Stingrays arrive to interact with the guides, staying with them wherever they went

Some of the Short Tail Stingrays have developed close bonding relationships with the two guides on our tour. These Stingrays kept coming up to the guides and held onto their legs. Sadly, one had a fish hook stuck in its mouth but the explanation was that this would oxidise and eventually fall off. We all hoped this would happen.

Interestingly, the Stingrays are very discriminating about the people towards whom they will make contact. Our guides were in fact sister and brother, and that seemed to have been an influential relationship. Stingrays actually pick up on and respond to personal blood pressure and other personal biofeedback influences.

This Short-tail Stingray named Aroha had a close relationship with our Guides

No fingers in the water and never underestimate the speed of a Kingfish!

If you've ever seen a Kingfish, they are a refined killing machine for smallish fish and other oceanic life. Their capacity to flash through the water is astounding! I have never been so close to a Kingfish so as to observe how they operate – circling the perimeter with periodic strikes through the water to attack fish bait or alternate food.

It was true that the Stingrays tried to swim through our legs and it was not always easy to hold the line and keep them in front of us. Now and again, Stingrays arrived from behind us wanting to move through our legs.

Stingray feeders told to build a tight partial circle restricting the Stingray swimming path

The Eagle Ray also has a sharp spine in its tail but is fairly sociable nonetheless

The Eagle Ray was particularly interesting in that its head is much more distinctive than the other Stingrays where the eyes and head are much more a part of the body. In all, we identified three different kinds of ray on this trip.

Feeding a Stingray is something of a challenge. It involves holding a piece of fish on a flat hand in front of the Stingray and under its head. As I attempted this, I kept looking for the Kingfish in fear of being attacked and my fish bait for the Stingray taken – along with my fingers. In the end, all was safe. What a great experience this was and I would encourage anyone to take advantage of this eco-tourism adventure! Go New Zealand!!

Feeding involves holding fish bait on a flat hand in front of the Stingray, wary of Kingfish!

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e-journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)

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ISSN 1605-7406
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Information

Publishers

CYC-Online (ISSN 1605-7406) is an open-access e-journal published monthly by The CYC-Net Press

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In general:

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