

# 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 219 / May 2017**



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editorial

# Milestones: Podcasts, Postcards and Presence

James Freeman



**A**s a child I remember leaning against the window on road trips watching the mile markers pass by. Sometimes it was on the way to holiday in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains in California or crossing the rural south while visiting extended family. One by one the signposts would appear



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marking the distance as we drove forward. There was a simplicity and joy in making the trip, appreciating the passing scenery, and watching the journey unfold. Remembering those small joys is helpful when I get caught up in just getting to the destination.

Milestones are, of course, signposts or literal stones on the side of the road or path. You can browse a interesting history and photo gallery of markers around the world at [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/milestone](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/milestone). Milestones can also be a significant point in the development of something or someone. These milestones are important for us to recognize in our own lives. The place where you are today is not where you were yesterday. Such markers show us how far we have come (or how little) and inform us in our decisions about which direction we might want to explore.

In the lives of young people who have been overwhelmed with trauma or difficult circumstances in life these milestones become harder to see. Sometimes it takes a caring person to point them out and make them clear. Sometimes we show progress with words like: “Wow, look how you handled that situation...I remember even just a few weeks ago that would have been a huge setback.” Sometimes mile markers come out in stories. Last month as my daughter celebrated her twelfth birthday we sat together and recounted the events surrounding her birth. After I finished the story, her two younger brothers both pleaded, “Tell my story, tell about mine”. They weren’t being greedy (they can do that, assuredly, but weren’t in this moment). There is something about human nature that wants to know where we have come from, where we are, and where we are headed - or at least the choices that may be ahead of us.

## Podcasts

There are two milestones in our CYC family to celebrate this month. Visitors to the home page at CYC-Net will recognize the podcast section linked to CYC Podcast ([www.cycpodcast.org](http://www.cycpodcast.org)). This archive of audio programs is produced and curated by Wolfgang Vachon and is close to reaching a milestone of 100 episodes.



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The site's byline is "discussions about Child and Youth Care with, and for, young people, parents and professionals". Just a glance at the last five published topics provides a sample of the diversity and interesting topics contained in this rich archive:

- A Women's Interfaith Educators Response to World Events
- Looking Beyond the Label: Young Mental Health
- Riding the School Bus: A CYC Perspective with Amanda Riley
- A Conversation About Refugees
- Mentoring Black Youth in Care: A Conversation with Anayah Phares about CHEERS.

I often listen to one on the commute from my home to our residential program and haven't yet found one where I didn't learn something new or gain a new perspective on a topic. Congratulations Wolfgang and CYC Podcast on nearly 100 episodes - and thank you for building such a useful compilation of audio resources for CYC practitioners around the world!

## Postcards

I have some treasured postcards from my grandparents which have special memories connected with them. As they visited different places they would drop me a note - however brief it may be - to share something about their travels and let me know they were thinking about me. It is a special privilege I am well aware of and appreciate in my own growing up.

Readers of *CYC-Online* will know that no issue of the monthly journal is complete without the final word and postcard from Leon Fulcher. I appreciate Leon's signature way of connecting global and local events into themes related to Child and Youth Care. I've heard from several readers that the monthly postcard helps them ground themselves in real life events and often gives content helpful for conversations with young people or family members. Leon writes to us each month



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with what I believe is the same intent as my grandparent's postcards - to let you know about something happening in the world and to assure you someone is thinking about you.

Leon's first *CYC-Online* 'postcard' was written from Beijing in May of 1999 and shared in issue five in June 1999. You can read it at [www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0699-fulcher.html](http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0699-fulcher.html). Don't miss the 1985 photo which includes Leon and *CYC-Net* co-founder Brian Gannon at the end of the postcard!. Over 200 issues later we still get to open up this journal every month and find a 'thinking of you' note that helps us make meaning of happenings around the world. It would likely be easier to make a map of where Leon has not written from than where he has. Thank you, Leon, for your postcards and thoughtfulness in helping us make the connections with global events and the daily life of young people with whom we work and live.

## **Presence**

There is one piece of writing this month I encourage you not to miss. Hans Skott-Myhre, a regular contributor to *CYC-Online*, often writes on themes of politics, power, and privilege. This month he continues with these common themes and reflects on our physical bodies and the 'practice of paying attention' with a very powerful example of two individuals connecting by breathing together. In his article he encourages us to replace viewing young people as 'resistant' and 'difficult to get through to' to viewing our 'mutuality of capacity' and the power of our bodies to connect and nurture growth in each other.

This month we also offer the final instalment of the series on the experience of women caregivers working in the SOS Children's Villages titled 'Examining Women's Lives: SOS Mothers Tell Their Stories'. We are thankful for the contribution of Elisabeth Ullmann, Karin Demuth, and Astrid Brandl in the sharing of these stories and close up examples of caring in the rhythm of everyday life with young people. We are thankful as well for the intimate photography featured from



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Fred Einkemmer. The courage and examples of the SOS Mothers has inspired CYC practitioners around the world.

With you until the next milestone,

**JF**



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# Our work begins with Us and We begin with the Body

Hans Skott-Myhre

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I find myself repeating certain things to my students. Perhaps this is a function of reaching a certain stage in life. Or, perhaps it is because some things are worth repeating. My mentor John Weakland used to say something similar when asked about his teaching style. Students would ask him why he didn't teach new things in his workshops and seminars. Why did he just kept going over and over the same central ideas and practice? He would respond that when his students fully grasped what he had been teaching so far, then he would be happy to move on to something else.

One of the things that I keep repeating to any of my students who will listen, is that you only have one tool in this work and that is you. Now, the problem with this is that most of what most of us know about who we are, is both ill-informed and at times a bit dangerous, both to ourselves and those around us. Indeed, the self that large numbers of us imagine to be our self is largely composed of habitual beliefs and behaviors we inherited, without much reflection, from the culture and society we were born into. A great deal of what we perpetuate, in our performances of ourselves, reinforces in both subtle and alarmingly obvious ways, the nomenclature of might be termed the ruling class.

The terms nomenclature and ruling class might seem a bit disconnected from any reasonable description of who we are, so let me see if I can break it down a bit. By nomenclature I mean the system of naming things so we can make sense of



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them. That is to say the set of meanings that we as individuals and communities use to compose ourselves as a system of ideas and practices.

By ruling class I mean the group of people who attempt to define our cultural and social nomenclature by 1) preying parasitically on the good minds and bodies of their fellow human beings 2) abstracting themselves to maximum degree possible from any negative effects their predatory behavior might have on the rest of society and 3) holding positions in the political hierarchy of global capitalism that allow them to enforce their rapacious appetites for material goods, sensory indulgences, and intellectual production on the rest of the planet both human and more than human.

Of course, none of us would willingly submit ourselves to being strip-mined of our creative capacities of thought, affect and physical expression. To the degree we are aware of anyone trying to force us to their will, we as human beings have a powerful tendency to resist. Anyone who has tried to run a group home or runaway shelter by trying to bend young people to their will knows both how a hierarchy of power works, and precisely how it can fail. We also know that if we are to shape young people to the will of the institution, we have to get them to somehow believe the aims and goals of the facility are the same as the aims and goals of the young person.

A similar logic applies to our performances and productions of self. To the degree that we understand that we are being taken advantage of, we will make every effort to resist by asserting an alternate logic based in our ability to express that which is idiosyncratically and uniquely our “self.” However, if we can be convinced that who we are is dependent upon a social logic that defines who we are, then we are far more likely to be compliant with the demands of the system. It is in this regard that I am suggesting that the idea that the only tool you have in working with young people is you, is rather complicated and somewhat problematic.

It is Foucault who tells us that the first political act is to undo, in ourselves, the habits and beliefs of our own age. Similarly, if we are to truly understand the full



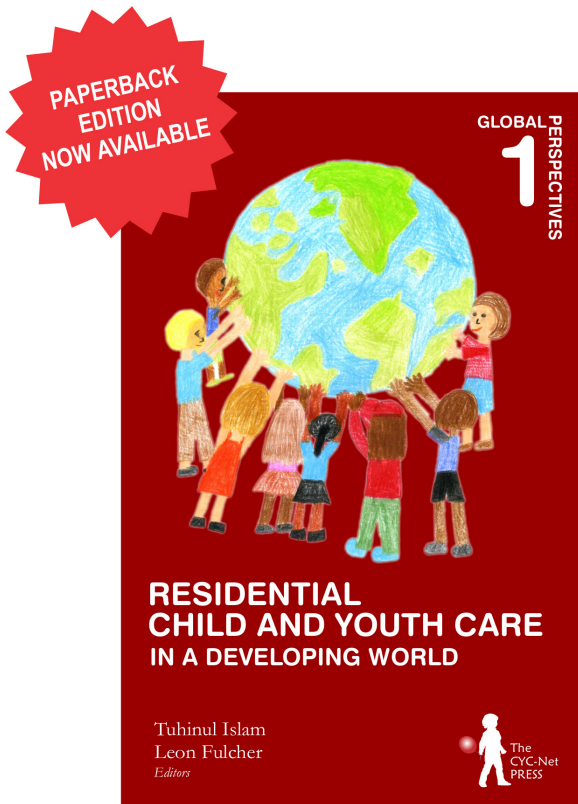
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capacity of the tool that is our self, then we must engage in a similar process. I would argue that to do this requires a careful interrogation of both our modes of thought and our apprehension of the role our body plays in the production of who we are.

The philosopher Spinoza makes a point of articulating the body as the starting point of our ability to apprehend the actuality of who we are in relation to everything else. He tells us that the mind is the thought of the body. This deceptively simple statement overturns much of what western philosophy has proposed for the past four hundred years or so. Put simply, it rejects the idea that, "I think therefore I am." Instead of starting with thought as the origin of the self, Spinoza suggests that we start with the body as the origin of who we are. For those of us interested in founding our work relationally this is very good news, because the body can only come to know itself through interactions with other bodies. Our perceptions are always interrelational.

Of course, we can only know our bodies through



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the realm of sensation. Our bodies feel the world as a set of infinitely complex interactions. The mind, as Spinoza suggests, is the vehicle through which we are able to create a vernacular for our experiences as embodied selves. Regrettably, as I have noted above, our ability to think is powerfully compromised by the beliefs and habits of our age. As a result, our ability to fully apprehend the capacities of the linkage between our body's experiences and the rich capacity for thought and expression is limited by what I have termed above the nomenclature of the ruling class. Spinoza has another way of describing such errors of thought. He calls them superstitions and inadequate modes of thought. By inadequate, he means that they don't apprehend the full set of relations that gives rise to any given thought.

This complex relation of body, thought and self has profound implications for what we are able to do. Spinoza suggests that our capacity for action is far more than we could ever imagine. Indeed, he says that no one can know what a body can do. If I am correct in my assertion that we are the only tool we have in our work with young people, then it might behoove us to explore our relation to our body and other bodies and to work a bit to undo our socially embedded superstitions and inadequate knowledges. We might begin with something quite simple like learning to pay attention to those actions of the body we all share.

This practice of paying attention was exemplified in the work of the psychiatric hypnotherapist Milton Erickson. There are many stories about Erickson's ability to pay attention to the ways that his body and the bodies of others informed his practice in powerful ways including his own use of his recovery twice from full body paralysis, his ability to overcome color blindness, dyslexia and tone deafness. But I want to focus on an instance of his work that uses body wisdom in a very simple and elegant way that I would propose has powerful resonances for the use of ourselves in our work with young people.

Kottler and Chen (2007) report on a visit that Dr. Erickson paid to a psychiatric hospital where he was introduced to a catatonic patient who had been "'frozen' into one position for more than a decade" (p. 149). The man had not either spoken nor moved in the entire time he had been in the institution. As far as the staff was



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concerned he was a hopeless case, but given Erickson's reputation as an innovator, they suggested he see what he could do.

Erickson sat down next to the man and noted that the only movement that the man appeared to be making was that of breathing. Erickson started with that very simple and obvious fact. He began to match the man's posture and to breathe at the same rate. He did this for over an hour, until he felt that he had a physical rapport both in how they shared a common body posture and in how they were now breathing together. Erickson then began to slowly increase the pace of his breathing and noticed the man began to match his pace. He then slowed his breathing down and noticed the man did the same. Erickson then varied the pattern with the catatonic man sometimes leading with Erickson matching him and vice versa.

*To the staff, Erickson must have looked like a lunatic all this time - sitting there as still as the catatonic man for hours on end ... Suddenly, and without warning, Erickson pulled out a cigarette and lit it, inhaling deeply. He turned to his new friend and said casually, "Would you like one?" "I thought you would never ask," the man said. The hospital staff was stunned. The patient hadn't moved, or said a word, in years and now he was busily chatting with Erickson as if they had been buddies for a long time. (p. 149)*

I think of this story and others like it when I hear my colleagues and other child and youth care workers talking about how difficult it can seem to be to get through to young people who don't seem to want to talk to us. I wonder about the utility of terms such as resistance or oppositional defiance and whether Erickson would have ever seen someone he worked with in this kind of nomenclature. I suspect that he would not find such descriptions very useful. Instead, he might suggest that we refine the tool that is our perceptions to such a fine edge that we are truly able to see our mutuality of capacity with the young people we encounter in our work.



To refine that, though, requires a careful parsing of both thought and bodily perception so as to open ourselves to the richness of our unconscious knowledge and wisdom. Deleuze (1988) when writing about Spinoza suggests that we need to “manage if possible, to capture the power of the body beyond the given conditions of our knowledge and to capture the power of the mind beyond the given conditions of our consciousness.” (p. 18) He notes that this doesn’t mean to devalue either thought or the body, but to question the role of our conscious awareness in “relation to our thought: a discovery of the unconscious, of an unconscious of thought just as profound as the unknown of the body.” (pp. 18-19)

I would propose that if our work begins with us as the primary tool, we have much to learn about that tool. This kind of learning cannot be prescribed by standards or competencies, but has to be found in the encounter with the other and the implications of that encounter for ourselves. This can’t be known in any fully conscious way, but has to be sensed in the way Erickson opened himself to the sense of the catatonic man. We might talk about this in Spinozist terms as a kind of intuition informed by reason. In this regard, no one knows what a body can do and the exploration of this simple idea, I might suggest as the *raison d’être* of CYC as a life art.

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Relational

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Volume 30 Issue 1 / 2017



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ISSN 2410-2954

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# The CYC Practitioner's Nightmare

Jack Phelan

There has been useful focus on the issue of love and showing affection in recent CYC literature. I am very happy to see us dealing with this emotional dynamic in a serious way, since I also experienced the disastrous way that “no touch” policies were foisted on practitioners for a while by nervous administrators. The assumption that affectionate contact between adults and children will inevitably lead to sexualized behavior has poisoned a lot of discussions and created awkward policies such as always keeping the door open when an adult is in a child’s bedroom. There is clearly a need for boundary awareness and professional judgement when interacting with neglected and abused children and youth, but avoidance of physical affection is not a useful response. The latest issue of *The Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care* (15, 3) is dedicated to a comprehensive look at love in our practice. I highly recommend reading it, and I will refer to an article by Cecile Neumann from Norway which discusses parental love and “family-like” love as a helpful approach. The love expressed by parents toward their children is a necessary and helpful experience that is missing in the lives of children in care and often can be provided by sensitive, experienced staff.

The article looks at parental love as something that children need, whether we wish to provide it or not. Neumann describes the complications inherent for paid professionals trying to create loving experiences to support children and youth, and how it is sometimes distorted by our own upbringing. Yet, despite the complications, it is still a necessary part of the experience required for healthy childhoods.



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Which brings me to the reason for the title of this piece. Early in my career I had the following dream, which remains a stumbling block for me as I intellectualize about love and affection as a practitioner.

I am working in a residential agency with a group of 10-13 year olds. There is a young boy who I have become connected with who has very serious abuse and neglect in his background and will probably need to be adopted, since his own family resources are not sufficient to provide for him. He is a very likeable and insightful boy, and in my dream he is magically adult-like in his reasoning and vocabulary. I am doing good work with him and he is progressing nicely through the program. He sits down with me at some point and states that he has made a decision about himself and his future. He describes his need for a permanent situation as he continues to grow up and that he understands that his own family cannot provide this. He states that he has looked at the possibilities of being adopted and he believes that this is the best option. He then states that he has been very happy with me since I am safe, available and resourceful, which has led him to the decision to choose me as the adult who he wants to adopt him.

There are lots of good articles in the CYC literature and many competent supervisors who caution about preparing children for the eventual and inevitable separation that will occur, but I believe that this is a real fear which leads to much of the reluctance of experienced CYC practitioners to embrace building the powerful connections with children that we acknowledge is needed.

We still have a lot of work to do here.



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# The Pragmatic Youth Worker: Idiographic Evidence-based Practice (EBP)

Doug Magnuson

Our youth work and child and youth care practice fields are subject to fads, much like clothing preferences and with not much more depth. When I was in graduate school in the 1990s, every two years there was a new practice trend that was marketed as more logical and as common sense: grief counseling, reconciliation, wrap-around services, community youth development, positive youth development, outdoor adventure, and so forth. Job descriptions were rewritten occasionally to take advantage of new grant and funding programs. One year you would describe yourself as a grief counsellor (since every youth with problems is grieving, right?) and two years later you would be a community worker (because it takes a village, right?). Those of us who have been around a while remember this as the era that trust falls became a joke: they began as a training exercise in outdoor programs and then everyone started doing them, a little pill thrill of adventure everyone was supposed to swallow.

That was also the era of the rise of evidence-based practice expectations and the resistance of youth work to the “discourse” of evidence-based practice. There was good reason for the expectation that evidence-based practice be implemented, and there was good reason for the resistance, and an unnecessary battle line developed between proponents and opponents. I am not sure we have progressed very much since then.



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We are still asked to choose between dichotomous options, and the basis of our choice is faith rather than experience and evidence. We are either for or against evidence-based practice. We are for or against relational practice. We are for or against critiques based on neo-Marxism, racism, and other “critical theories.” We are for or against behaviorism, cognitive-developmental theory, trauma-focused practice, and professionalization. The problem is neatly summarized in the phrase, “My mother, drunk or sober.” These are allegiances rather than reasoned arguments based on experience, evaluation, and research.

Subtlety is not our strength. So what to do? I suggest we revisit EBP and consider incorporating it into our repertoire of competencies. We want a version that is compatible with the diversity of people, practices, and communities. This may help us refocus priorities.

Bonnie Spring (2007) describes two major types of EBP. One is composed of “nomothetic” approaches. These include practice guidelines and lists of “best practices,” and these “specify the best research-supported treatment for a disorder, biopsychosocial condition, or life problem. The recommended treatment approach is, in a sense, ‘one-size-fits-all’: It assumes relatively homogeneous intervention needs among different individuals who have the clinical problem” (p. 613). Another nomothetic approach is “empirically supported treatments” (EST). These are similar in structure to guidelines, but they are about interventions, not problems. These suggest “the best treatment approach for the average patient” (p. 612). Of course, the “average patient” is rarely found.

The other type of EBP is idiographic, “decision-making for the care of individual patients (p. 612). Spring is describing work in health care, which is why she uses the word “patient.” This idiographic process is based “on three strands: a) the best available research evidence; (b) clinical expertise; and (c) patient values, preferences, characteristics, and circumstances” (p. 613). Spring conducted an informal survey of educators in psychology to see how they were teaching evidence-based principles. She found that “most respondents equated evidence-based practice with empirically supported treatment” (p. 619). This is the reason



youth workers object to evidence-based practices: advocates of EPB often conflate EBP to only the nomothetic approaches, and this does not work with the wide variety of circumstances, cultures, and individual differences that practitioners encounter.

Instead, we might consider going back to the roots of youth work, group work, and EBP. These share something in common: the expectation that if something is not working that one should stop doing it and try something else. One root of evidence-based theory has a Canadian history, at McMaster University. Faculty there developed a “5-step EBM process that entailed performing 5 A’s: Ask (formulate the question), Acquire (search for answers by acquiring the evidence), Appraise (evaluate the evidence for quality, relevance, and clinical significance), Apply the results, and Assess the outcome” (Springer, 2007, p. 619). This sequence is the same action-research cycle developed by Kurt Lewin and applied to group work research from the 1930s onward and also used in experiential learning theory.

Instead of doubling down on a theory or tenet and asking practitioners to swear allegiance, we might want to double down on the search for an approach that gives practitioners autonomy to use any approach that serves the interests of those they serve, perhaps using something like the 5 A’s. As Gambrill (2011) says, it is a way of thinking systematically about “how decisions ought to be made,” managing uncertainty, and “sharing ignorance as well as knowledge.”

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# Quirky Brilliance in Residential Care and Treatment

Kiaras Gharabaghi

**F**ar too often I am inclined to write about some of the challenges and issues, and indeed, some of the absurdities I have come across in residential care and treatment programs. This month I want to do the total opposite, and mention a few things I have come across that are quirky, but brilliant. While my contribution this month is short, my hope is that those who work in residential care and treatment find some comfort in this confirmation that there is a place for quirky ideas and practices in excellent child and youth care practice.

I am inspired to write this piece after coming across a particularly brilliant piece of child and youth-focused thinking at Casa Pacifica, an agency offering residential and non-residential supports and services to young people and their families in California. The agency has a large campus with several residential programs and a school. Currently, they are building a new house on the campus, and during the construction, the site is fenced off and you can't see through the fence. Someone at Casa Pacifica decided that the young people who live there might be curious about what is happening inside the fenced area. So they built a platform, about 10 feet high, in the middle of the campus near the construction site. Young people can go on the platform and see across the fence, watch the construction process and monitor how the new house is coming along. This is brilliant, reflects a child and youth-centered orientation and represents a sincere effort to occasionally 'think like a young person'.

At a group home in Ontario, four of six residents were close to failing their required grade 9 French credit; their only hope was to do really well on an oral final exam. None of the young people were especially motivated to study in



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traditional ways. The staff team decided to run their program entirely in French for the whole week before the exam, even though most of the staff could barely string a sentence together. With the help of dictionaries and google Translate, they managed to get along just fine. The result was that all four young people passed the oral exam with flying colours, the staff learned some French, and during that week, there wasn't a single serious incident in the program. I asked a young person why there were no incidents during that week, and the young person said 'I didn't know how to be an ass in French'. Then I asked a staff, and she said 'I didn't know how to withdraw privileges in French, so I just hugged kids when I would normally give a consequence'.

Another program in Ontario had a problem with its residents chronically leaving the home without permission and hanging out at the mall. After trying various kinds of interventions and getting nowhere, one of the staff got in touch with the Mall Management, and negotiated permission to operate a 'Bag Carrying for Charity' program. Once in place, the staff started showing up to work at the mall rather than the group home, and they started carrying bags for people to their cars. Occasionally they would ask for help from the kids who were just hanging around, and as they started helping, they totally got into the process and raised nearly \$400 in the two days the program operated. Together, they decided to donate that money to a refugee settlement program in the city, and then they went out for a big dinner with the staff to celebrate their success.

These are just three little examples of quirky things that happen in residential care and treatment that are actually awesome and reflective of excellent child and youth care practice. I am sure there are unlimited stories of this nature. I would love to hear them!

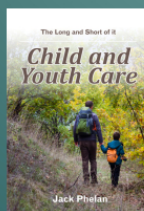
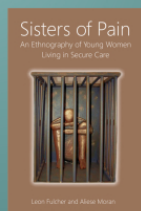
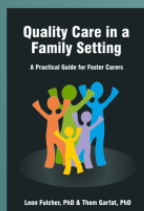
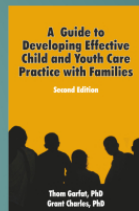
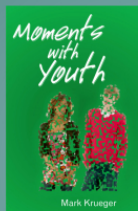
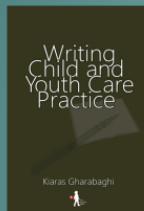
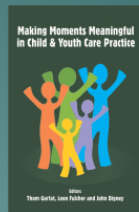
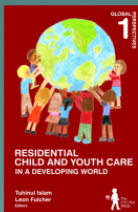
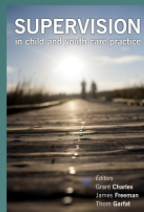
In the meantime, here's to the child and youth care practitioners for whom a box is just some card board, rules are just artistic sequences of words, and routine is the enemy.



**CYC-Online May 2017**

**ISSN 1605-7406**

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**CYC-Online May 2017**

**ISSN 1605-7406**

# Every day is new

Brian Gannon

**T**he worst thing that can happen to our agency is for it to fall into a rut, to settle into a routine, to rely on rigid procedures ... in short, to become institutionalising. For then it develops a set of standard reactions — rather than unique responses — to each day's eventualities.

The seductive ideas behind this are that the organisation has "matured", has become "fair" and "consistent". In reality, standard routines simply save such an agency from having to think. They save us from having to think.

And, in reality, every day is new, and every event is new.

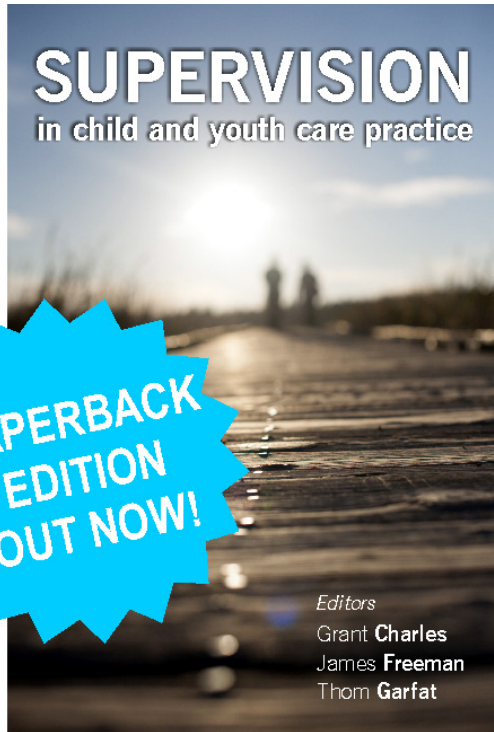
I was once sharply corrected by a colleague. "O Lord," I lamented. "It's George's birthday thing this afternoon. If I have one more thirteen-year-old's birthday this month I shall go nuts!" My colleague replied quietly: "But for George, it is going to be the only thirteen-year-old birthday in his life."

This is the level of alertness which we are called to when we work with children, an alertness which demands that we constantly recognise the significance of events and people, no matter how many we have seen before. We have to "walk around" the thirteen-year-old birthday so that we can see it from all angles, in all lights, from everyone's point of view. And instead of becoming bored by them, we thus become experts at thirteen-year-old birthdays. This is what child care workers are — experts at understanding the significance of people and of life events. Experts at knowing the possibilities and the pitfalls. Experts at connecting the sequences of events into meaning, the participants into relationships.



In this way we become useful, not only with birthdays but also with all other developmental milestones and rites of passage, with all transitions and dead-ends, with all celebrations and crises. This is not just another tantrum (or runaway, or graduation, or unwanted pregnancy, or new job, or suicide attempt, or first date, or separation ...) but a potentially momentous event which must be "done" with empathy and with proficiency.

So, child and youth care workers approach these events with the confidence of the plumber with his toolbox — our theory, our skill, our reading, what others have taught us, and our own past experience. As with the plumber, our first burst pipe is quite a challenge and trauma — but our tenth burst pipe is not boring, just something we have become better at.



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ISSN 1605-7406

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# The Down and Dirty Essentials of Professional Boundary Terminology

Pamela A. Richmond, PhD

## Abstract

*While it is clear that sexual interactions with youth are never appropriate in a professional relationship, the ambiguity of non-sexual boundary situations such as physical touch and the disclosure of personal information are not as exact. In keeping with the spirit of youth workers sharing knowledge with other workers, I offer my professional experiences and highlight the different ways that boundary terms are used within the literature.*

In my early days as a youth worker, the term ‘boundaries’ was used freely by staff members. In retrospect, not only did I not have a clear understanding of professional boundaries, I also lacked critical thinking when it came to handling boundary situations (Richmond, 2003). Rather, I just said and did what I thought was expected of me by my superiors. However, when the staff personnel changed at the agency, so did the boundaries between the teen and youth workers—boundary interactions were much more relaxed. Unfortunately, because of my lack of understanding I crossed professional boundaries with a teenager named Holly by befriending her. When the relationship became emotionally taxing for me I abruptly terminated our interaction and then felt terrible for doing so. It was at that time that I began my journey towards having a better understanding of the complexities of and reflection on the subject of professional boundaries (Richmond, 2003).



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I am intrigued with the topic of professional boundaries because I believe that in out-of-home placements boundary situations arise on a consistent basis and youth are the recipients of the boundary decisions made by workers. For example, is nonsexual touch between a youth worker and teen proper? There are some practitioners who claim that youth in out-of-home placements need physical contact from adults (Garfat, 1998; McElwee, McKenna-McElwee; & Phelan, 2002). However, there may be workers employed by agencies where touch such as hugging is prohibited (Pazaratz, 2001). Other examples of boundary challenges for youth workers are "...friendships and friendliness, gift giving, advocacy, and bartering and employment" (Spence, 1999, p. 44). Fortunately, I was afforded the opportunity to continue my journey and explore my passion of professional boundaries further while I worked on my graduate degrees.

During my master's program in social work a colleague and I conducted a study interviewing youth workers and administrators regarding their perceptions of professional boundaries. One of the findings revealed that youth workers were not receiving formal training on professional boundaries (Richmond & Padgett, 2002). More recently while working on my doctoral degree, I conducted a study on professional boundaries from the perspective of teenage females in residential treatment. It was clear after my interviews that teens were experiencing a disconnection from what they wanted and what youth workers were delivering in response to professional boundaries (Richmond, 2005, 2006). But, much to my surprise, there is very little written on the topic of boundaries between youth workers and adolescents in treatment programs. For more information on three empirical studies on the subject of boundaries see Okamoto (2003), Richmond and Padgett( 2002) and Zirkle, Jensen, Collins-Marotte, Murphy, and Maddux (2002).

Why is it important to have an understanding of boundary terms that are used in practice? Three keys points instantly come to mind. First, boundaries are the limits that are typically set by the staff members (Soth, 1997). Second, youth workers are instrumental participants in treatment planning and implementation. And most important, boundary interactions between youth workers and teens can



have either positive or negative implications. Therefore, having an understanding of professional boundary terms can be useful in therapeutic interactions. In keeping with the spirit of youth workers sharing knowledge with other youth workers, I would like to highlight the different ways that boundary terms are used within the literature.

## **Professional Boundaries**

### **Boundary Definition**

My favorite definition of professional boundaries comes from Dr. Charles Whitfield. He explains, “a boundary or limit is *how far we can go with comfort* in a relationship. It delineates where I and my physical and psychological space ends and where you and yours begin” (Whitfield, 1993, p. 1). McGuire (1996) indicates that boundary breaches can take place in four areas — “physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual.” (p. 4). There is a difference between boundary crossings and boundary violations. A *boundary crossing* is when a worker is “...involved in a dual relationship with a client or colleague in a manner that is not intentionally exploitative, manipulative, deceptive, or coercive” (Reamer, 2003, p. 123). One example of a boundary crossing is buying a client a winter jacket when they need one and cannot afford to buy their own. Reamer (2003) explains that a *boundary violation* “...occurs when a...worker engages in a dual relationship with a client or colleague that is exploitative, manipulative, deceptive, or coercive” (p. 122). Having sexual relations with a client is considered to be a boundary violation (Norris, Gutheil, and Strasburger, 2003) and is highly inappropriate, unethical and potentially harmful to the client. While the literature is wrought with different terms and explanations of the professional relationship, for purposes of our discussion, the emphasis will be on boundary crossings and not boundary violations.

### **Boundary Crossings and Dual Relationships**

In the literature boundary crossings are typically referred to as nonsexual dual relationships. A nonsexual dual relationship is defined as a helping professional and



client entering into another relationship in addition to the primary relationship (Valentich and Gripton, 1992). Nonsexual relationships involve “personal, social, business, and secondary financial relationships” (Herlihy & Corey, 1992, p. 6). In general, dual relationships have the capacity to be problematic because of the discrepancies in power and the turmoil of confused roles in the professional relationship (Kitchener, 2000). Further, dual relationships can be consequential because, “in any dual relationship, the practitioner’s influence and the client’s vulnerability carry over into the second relationship” (Kagle & Giebelhausen, 1994, p. 215). Dual relationships can be considered a boundary crossing that has the potential to become a boundary violation depending on the client, circumstances and infraction. Clarkson (1994) offering a different viewpoint, postulates that it is unrealistic to believe that practitioners can avoid all dual relationships. As a result, she suggests that it is important for workers to know how to respond to situations of dual relationships if and when they arise.

### ***Transference and Countertransference***

Commonly referenced in the literature are the phrases transference and countertransference that are culled from a psychoanalytic perspective. Freud coined the terms transference and countertransference to describe the interaction taking place between the worker and client. Transference is explained as “...your clients’ needs and vulnerability shape their perception of you and the therapeutic relationship. Based on issues and relationships from the past, the client puts various “faces” on you—faces that are not your own” (McGuire, 1996, p. 10). Kahn (1991) characterizes countertransference as “...all feelings and attitudes about the client that occur in the therapist” [or worker] (p. 118). Depending on the worker’s awareness and use of countertransference, it can be helpful or harmful to the therapeutic relationship (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998; Kahn, 1991). One example of unhelpful countertransference might be when a worker over-identifies with an aggressive client and does not set limits because they remember being chastised for use of aggression in the past. Conversely, positive



countertransference can be helpful to the client. In referring to the previous example of an aggressive client, if the worker has an understanding of the aggression they felt, they can use the memories of their past to assist the client in working through the anger.

### **Ethical Predicaments**

Ethical predicaments are common to the professional interaction between the worker and client. Ethical dilemmas are defined as circumstances emerging for workers that present two opposing values in which the worker cannot “serve each obligation with equal justice” (McGowan & Mattison, 1998, p. 51). For example, a client is struggling with his sexual identity—he is not sure if he is gay. A worker that is gay (but is not open at his place of employment about his sexual orientation) has a strong working relationship with the client. The worker is faced with the dilemma of whether or not he should disclose his sexual orientation and struggles of “coming out” to the client. The case scenario is an example of an ethical dilemma. In this scenario, the worker must weigh the pros and cons of disclosing his sexual orientation, ever mindful that whatever decision he makes should be in the best interest of the client.

Professional codes can assist workers when working with clients (for example, the National Organization of Child Care Worker Associations, 1995). A professional code of ethics is a collection of ethical principles that practitioners are expected to uphold (Lowenberg & Dolgoff, 1992). In addition, there are numerous guides for assisting workers in handling the dilemmas they face (see Congress, 2001; Garfat & Ricks, 1995; McGuire, 1996). In general, codes of ethics are written in broad terms without fixed rules that workers can follow to resolve a professional dilemma (Mattison, 2000; McGrath, 1994; National Association of Social Workers, 1999).

### **Conclusion**

Having an understanding of boundary terms is an important step in professional development. But in my experience, it is equally important to recognize when



boundary situations are present and then to know how to apply the professional terminology. I believe that understanding and responding to professional boundaries is an on-going learning experience. Therefore, there are several actions that can take place on an on-going basis at your place of employment.

First, have open and honest dialogues with your supervisor or supportive conversations with other youth workers, and utilize the expertise of the other clinical staff (they will have helpful information that they have gleaned from their experiences and study). Outside of the employment setting you can read boundary literature, become active in youth work organizations, attend conferences where professional boundary topics are discussed and, finally, you can share your boundary experiences by writing about them. Gerry Fewster, a forerunner in the youth work profession, emphasizes the importance of youth workers writing personally and genuinely about their interactions with young people. In part, Fewster (1991) states:

*In taking the courage to share their own experience in working with young people, they [youth workers] have an opportunity to generate a body of knowledge that promotes understanding, caring, and respect ... In peeling back the layers of their own experience, child and youth care workers can make a unique contribution to our understanding of how it really is to work with troubled kids (p. 62).*

To summarize, the literature on boundaries is rich with interpretations of what the parameters are, and are not, in the professional relationship. While it is clear that sexual interactions are a clear boundary violation and are never appropriate in a professional relationship, the portrayal of what is a boundary crossing is not as exact. The ambiguity of boundary crossings such as physical touch, disclosure of personal information, and the determination of when the professional relationship has ceased can pose a challenge for youth workers. Further, in an effort to help and with good intentions, boundaries may be inadvertently crossed. My hope is that you will relate the boundary terms to your own practice while continuously



challenging yourself and others in the profession to have a deeper and more meaningful understanding of boundary interactions with clients.

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From *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, Vol 23.2, pp39-43



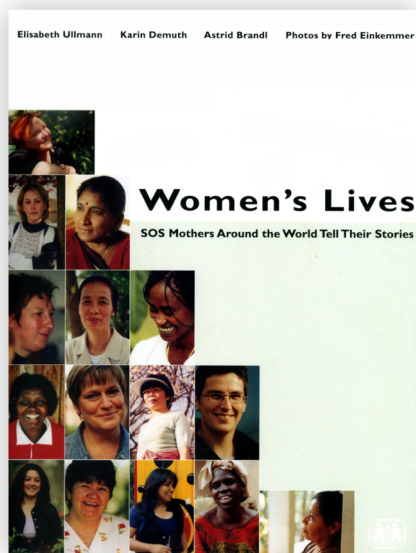
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# Women's Lives: SOS Mothers tell their stories



## Patricia Goffart

Born 3.7.1963, France

*My previous job just involved routine. What counted were results and not the human factor. I discovered that everything in the SOS Children's Village is based on human relationships. It was a huge change for me, but I was very happy, because I'd been looking for this contact, these relationships with other people.*

**P**atricia comes from a working-class family and grows up in a Parisian suburb where crime and social problems are a part of daily life. Despite living in these surroundings, Patricia experiences a happy, loving and secure childhood. She discovers, within her family, how important humanity, solidarity and honest relationships are. Her family still gives her strength and support today.

Patricia leaves school when she is fifteen and does an apprenticeship as a hairdresser. Afterwards she works as a pre-school teacher for a time. Finally, she



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takes a job with a large company, works her way up over the years and earns good money. However, despite her successful career, Patricia feels empty inside. She would like to have closer human relationships at work too. She finds what she has been looking for in the SOS Children's Village and says, "Giving to others, so as to receive something back - isn't that what life is all about?"

## **The Story of Her Life**

*"My family is my life-line, my security and my source of strength."*

I was born in Saint-Ouen, near Paris. We lived in a four-storey block of flats. There were lots of other similar houses there, which lay close to one another. On



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the other side of the road there was a ten-storey block of flats. It was a so-called "cité", a council estate.

I come from a family of three daughters. I'm the eldest. I am thirty-nine years old, have one sister, who is thirty-five and has four children, and another of thirty-three, who has three children. They are both married and have given up their jobs. The older sister lives in the west of France and the younger one near Paris. I always lived with my parents. From the time I was born, both my parents worked. My mother still works. My father has already retired and I visit them regularly. The age difference between my parents is twenty-three years. That's quite a lot. Therefore, there are no relatives left on my father's side. On my mother's side, I've still got my grandmother and my mother's two sisters.



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### ***What does "family" mean to you?***

We are very close to one another in our family. The term "family" is very important to us. Both my sisters are also my best friends. To me, my family are my parents, my sisters, both my brothers-in-law, my nephews and nieces. My family is my life-line, my security and my source of strength. It's everything to me.

### ***How was your childhood?***

My parents come from the working classes. We had everything we needed, but no more than that. We didn't go out much and didn't do much sport, but we were happy. When I started working in the SOS Children's Village, it became even clearer to me, what significance the family has, and how important it is for children, especially when they're still very young, so that they can grow up to be "normal". My work in the SOS Children's Village has brought to light how lucky I was to have parents like mine.

My parents seemed equal to me. My father cooked, looked after us, bathed and washed us. There were also things that he didn't do, but he helped with the housework. I could always feel the love that bound my parents. They presented a marriage full of affection, tenderness and love to us over the years.

I grew up in a Parisian suburb that was full of problems such as crime and drugs, but most of it passed me by. I think the reason for that was my upbringing. My parents trusted me. Of course, I tried a few things out, but I knew when to stop.

My sisters and I had a very happy childhood. We were sheltered and spoiled. Our parents gave us lot of affection, attention and protection. That's good, of course, but perhaps we were a little too sheltered. It could be the reason why I had problems approaching other people, didn't trust myself to do some things, and was shy and withdrawn. Over the years, that has improved, but I think I took longer than most before I knew what I wanted to do.



### ***What were your educational path and your career like?***

I was sent to a crèche when I was eight months old. Later I went to pre-school, primary school and grammar school. I left the grammar school when I was fifteen and started an apprenticeship as a hairdresser. That lasted three years. I got my diploma and then my journeyman's certificate after another year's training. After that, my boss wouldn't extend my contract, because I was too qualified for him and would have earned too much. I was unemployed. I started working as a carer in the pre-schools during this time. I enjoyed that very much. However, the problem was the pay. I didn't earn very much and was still living with my parents. A year later, I started as a worker in a company. I worked my way up to management level and stayed there for sixteen years. This company was taken over by a huge media conglomerate three years ago. That's when I decided to leave.

### ***What do you like to do in your free time?***

I like to go to the cinema in my free time. I can't get away too often, so I keep myself busy with work around the house. I've learned to cook, and I take care of our little garden and the house. I've tried embroidery and making mosaics. I also enjoy pottery. What I do depends on what mood I'm in. There are also evenings when I read or watch television, because I'm tired. I've recently started doing yoga.

### **Motivation for Her Choice of Profession**

*"I need open, honest and serious relationships."*

Most women feel the need to get married and have children during their lives. I didn't feel that need when I was young, but it didn't worry me. All my friends got married when they were still quite young. I wasn't married and that bothered them more than it did me. My mother and father thought a lot about it too. They often talked about it, and I'd reply, "That's the way it is. I can deal with it."



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I'm happy the way I am. There are so many other things in life: so many possibilities to help other people, for example. I told myself that I would fulfil myself this way. I know I need the feeling of trust. I need open, honest and serious relationships.

***When did you first have the idea to become an SOS mother?***

I was working more than eleven hours a day. I liked that to start with. I had the chance to develop my career and it was interesting. As the years passed, I realised, however, that I wasn't satisfied and that I didn't have what I expected from life. So, I



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started by slowing down a gear and thinking about what was bothering me. I'd always had chances in life that I'd grasped, but in reality it was never me who dictated what I wanted or didn't want to do. I was lucky enough to earn good money and to do a job that I enjoyed for many years whilst I was working for the company. But I realised that money wasn't everything and that I had to do something else, in order for my life to be fulfilled. It was around this time that I started to ask myself what I really wanted to do. I went to my sister's in Brittany and she said to me, "Stay here and take the time you need to think."

I wanted to be a foster mother. That wouldn't have been possible, though, because in France you have to be married and have children of your own. So I wrote to the newspapers and women's magazines, asking for information and recommendations. I described my motives and what I wanted to do. They all sent me replies with tips about various organisations, and contact addresses. That's how I got the address for SOS Children's Villages France. The concept was exactly what I'd been looking for and how I'd described it in my letter.

### ***What supported your decision?***

My previous job just involved routine. What counted were results and not the human factor. I discovered that everything in the SOS Children's Village is based on human relationships. It was a huge change for me, but I was very happy, because I'd been looking for this contact, relationships with other people. You can't pretend in front of the children. You can't. That's impossible.

### ***How do you explain to others why you became an SOS mother?***

If you'd asked me a year ago why I'm here, I would have answered, "In order to help others." In reality you ask yourself why you're here all the time. My basis and motivation are the same today, but my feelings are different. Why am I here? Certainly to help others, but I'm also here on my behalf. I need to feel that I'm useful. I need to feel that my work is being regarded, and I need to have a clear conscience and be at one with myself. If you want to give to other people, you first



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of all have to be clear in yourself. I think that you have to be convinced and that you need moral commitment. I think that the women who carry out this profession have one thing in common, and that is that they give of themselves. Perhaps I'm exaggerating a bit when I say that. Giving to others, so as to receive something back - isn't that what life is all about?



### ***How did your friends and family react to your decision?***

I didn't even talk about it to begin with. I wanted this to be something special and didn't want to be influenced in any way. I only told my family after I'd sent the letters and got in touch with the organisation. They were impressed with the idea. My friends were of the opinion that my plans weren't particularly ambitious, but they thought it was brave of me to change to an entirely different field. The fact



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that I wasn't married and had no children was a big advantage, because it meant that I could do what I wanted without any hindrances from a family.

## **Experiences as an SOS Mother**

*"It's a new start: a new way of life, of thinking and of acting."*

I arrived in the SOS Children's Village with all my luggage on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1999. The first thing I did was to take part in a construction meeting. Three of the ten family houses and the community house were already finished. I was allowed to inspect the houses that were still being built and found that very pleasant, but also quite funny, because I was asked my opinion. Afterwards I was allowed to choose the wallpaper and the furniture for the house in which I was going to be living.

The whole team accepted me warmly; at that time there were the village director and three SOS mothers. I ate with one of the SOS mothers, who was already living with her children. Her house hadn't quite been finished and there were still lots of things missing. I started a one-month practical course with a social worker at the beginning of September, and in October I covered for the three existing family houses. I got everything ready in one of the houses and took in a group of four brothers and sisters on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October.

### ***How would you describe yours tasks in the SOS Children's Village?***

My tasks are to take in children who are in need, to accompany them, support them and love them. I'm here to give them a secure place where they can find trust. This should all make it possible for them to grow up and develop in a way that every child has a right to.



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### ***What has changed in your life since you've been working in the SOS Children's Village?***

It's a new start: a new way of life, of thinking and of acting. I have good relationships, especially with the children. I'm learning a lot from them. You have to be able to find your place, recognise your own mistakes, question, observe and analyse yourself. I wasn't able to do that before. What counted then were the results, and human relationships came short. It's wonderful to meet people who welcome you warmly and who take the time to listen. My attitude and behaviour have changed and I'm now better at listening to others. I'm under much less stress and don't have migraines anymore.

You can't carry out this profession like you could any other. Everything has to be taken seriously when it comes to human relationships, otherwise they won't



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work. In our day-to-day life, it can happen that I tell the children off. When I'm on my own in the evening, I ask myself whether I acted correctly, or whether I went too far. I never used to do that. An SOS mother can never claim that everything's going well, and that everything's perfect. I often question myself.

### ***Have you experienced solidarity in the SOS Children's Village?***

I don't think there are many people in our society who really experience solidarity. It actually does exist in the SOS Children's Village, though. There are always women who are prepared to help, as soon as there's a problem in one of the houses. No matter whether it's a private matter or something to do with work, there's always somebody there. We couldn't do without the spirit of community amongst the SOS mothers. We spend a lot of time together, share the same worries, have the same difficulties and questions. Who can better understand the problems an SOS mother is having, if not another SOS mother?

SOS Children's Village Châteaudun is a new village and we moved in at intervals of just a few months. When we arrived, we didn't have to find our place, as we would have had to in an existing SOS Children's Village. That was a great advantage for us, but also a disadvantage, because we didn't have much experience. That's why we had to help each other and were dependent on one another when we took the children in, and in dealing with daily life with all its worries and problems.

When I talk about solidarity, I mean the closeness between the SOS mothers. Our relationships to the rest of the team are more of a working nature. We work together on projects for each individual child. Recently, we had an incident where one of the SOS mothers fell ill. Immediately, two other SOS mothers offered to take her children in. They knew the children and their habits and knew that the SOS mother who was ill would be relieved to know that her children were with them. Sometimes we take the children from one of the other family houses for an hour, a day, or perhaps longer, in order to relieve the SOS mother. These requests don't always come from the village director or the head educator. Because we SOS mothers are so close to one another, we notice when one of the others is having



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difficulties, either with her children or her private life. It's not always easy to take in one or more children, when you're already looking after five or six brothers and sisters.

I can say today that I've made some friendships in the village that go beyond a working relationship.

***There is an SOS mother in SOS Children's Village Châteaudun, who is married. What do you think about that?***

I think that a woman who works in an SOS Children's Village and, at the same time, tries to lead a private life with her husband and children, has a different set of problems to a single woman. There is a married couple in SOS Children's Village Châteaudun, who have a child of their own and have taken in four other children. Her husband helps with bringing up the children. Even though he's not paid, he's an important pillar in the family. He has to know his place in the village. We single SOS mothers get on well with this couple, even if we sometimes have the feeling that we're disturbing them, when we're in their house.

In my opinion, once the children reach a certain age, they miss the presence of a male figure. There are too few males present both inside and outside the village. Most of the teachers are women, and so the children are in a strongly female environment. The point is that children who have experienced suffering and violence from their parents - and mostly from their fathers - have to learn that not all men are like that. I've noticed that the children always appreciate the presence of a man. They're attentive, they observe him in detail and sometimes try to test the boundaries.

***How was your training to be an SOS mother?***

There were five SOS mothers from SOS Children's Village Châteaudun, who did their training together in January 2000. The year's training was very enriching, both on a professional and on a private basis. We were twelve SOS mothers from various villages, and we met for a week every month for ten months. We enjoyed



our "à la carte" course, which had been organised by a state high school. Our trainers were all very competent.

I'd already taken in my four children, when I started the course. I took my questions and problems with me to each lesson. They taught us to hold dialogues, to communicate and to observe. We talked about ill-feelings, needs, feelings and all the things that concerned us. We talked for hours, and sometimes sat together in the evenings and talked about everything under the sun. What a year that was - what a group of people and what memories!

We would like to have had some further training after this first year. We would like to repeat some things, or perhaps take on new topics that affect our work. Two years have passed now and I feel I've been left on my own a bit. That's why I applied to do a further training course on my own this year.

**SOS Children's Village  
Châteaudun is a so-called  
"integrated SOS Children's  
Village". Could you describe  
that in more detail for us?**

We live on an estate of about forty houses. The houses have been built with one SOS Children's Village house next to a private house, so you really



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have the impression that you're a part of the estate. I think that's a good thing, because the children really don't need to bear another stamp. Belonging to the village is a big enough stamp in itself. The children from the SOS Children's Village are often together; even at school they build a clique. It's probably a reaction to make themselves feel safer. We have to show our children that it can work well, when children live with their own parents. That's why I'm interested in finding people from the neighbourhood to help my children with their homework. One of my boys spends one evening a week with a family: the father helps his own children and my boy with their homework.

However, despite that, I still think there's a lot of mistrust on the part of people from outside. I don't know if that's caused by a lack of information, for reasons of doubt or fear. Only a few people have spontaneously offered us their help.

### ***What do you like least about your work?***

If I'm honest, the things that I hate most are the looks we get from people from outside. I tend to try to protect the children and sometimes react aggressively. The problem for me is not what people think of me - I'm grown up and can cope with that - but when it concerns the children, I often have the feeling that people are mistaking the victims for the guilty party.

### ***In your opinion, how is the profession of an SOS mother viewed in France?***

I don't think that we receive much recognition from our society. People don't see much difference between the work that foster families, homes and SOS mothers do. They don't know what the work of an SOS Children's Village consists of, or what role we have. Some people find this choice of profession disconcerting and wonder, "What's not right with these women?"

I have the impression that, within the organisation, people have a very strong image of an SOS mother. This can sometimes be detrimental to the SOS aunts, who never get a mention. The same goes for the team of psychologists, educators and other co-workers. If you watch the reports and read the articles, there seems



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to be a sort of myth about the function of an SOS mother. This picture isn't a reflection of reality. Sometimes I even have the feeling that the SOS mothers are put too much in the limelight and are seen as equals to the children. We don't have the professional abilities that an educator or psychologist has, but because of the time we spend with the children, we have the knowledge which allows the professionals to work on the children's development.

## **The Children in Her Care**

*"There are deep wounds that have to heal first."*

When I first came to the SOS Children's Village, everything was wonderful and beautiful. You can't begin to imagine, then, what suffering and problems are hidden behind the children's faces. Some things shocked me. There were things I'd never experienced before and could hardly imagine. You know what incest is and you also know what violence is, but when a child describes it in his or her own words... that's terrible. And all the time, you're thinking about your own childhood. I often think about how I would have turned out, if my parents had done the same things to me. I think it would have ruined me. If you see these children and the strength they've had to overcome all of that, you can't expect too much from them straight away. There are deep wounds that have to heal first, wounds that are invisible on the outside.

### ***How do the children come to the SOS Children's Village?***

The courts in France decide that a child should be taken into an SOS Children's Village for a certain time. The child is put under the care of the youth welfare authorities and normally put into a home or a foster family first. We're then sent the children's files. Usually we deal with groups of brothers and sisters. If a child comes to the SOS Children's Village, the parents still maintain their rights over that child. I'm responsible for everything in the house, such as clothing and food.



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However, any decisions which would affect the children themselves, or their lives outside, have to be made in agreement with the natural parents. For example, the parents have a right to make decisions on anything to do with a change of school, a medical question or leisure time activities. They can even decide against what we've suggested. If one of the girls in my care needs a haircut, I have to get the parents' consent first. I must admit that, at first, it really bothered me to have to get the parents' consent on so many things. After all, they weren't able to look after the children properly in the first place. With time, I realised, though, that it has to do with helping the parents to take responsibility for their children again. Most of the parents of our children come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. They experienced what they're doing to their children in their own childhoods.

In my opinion, we don't use enough resources here in France to help people in need. It's not enough time for parents to understand their children, watch them grow up, experience their successes and see them in their daily lives, if they only spend an hour and a half a month with them. The majority of the children are only accommodated in the SOS Children's Village for a certain length of time, and it's assumed that they'll return to their natural families at some stage. The contact with the natural families should be more intense: for the benefit of the children, as well as being a conclusion to our work.

### ***How many children are in your care at present?***

I took in four brothers and sisters on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1999. There are two girls and two boys. Their elder sister was supposed to come too, but nothing came of that, because she had big problems. The children come from a socially deprived and difficult background. The family has been known to the youth welfare authorities for a long time. The children have been exposed to a lot of violence and deprivation. Right at the start I thought I was sitting with a completely wild horde. All of the children were aggressive, with exception of the youngest. None of them wanted to live in the SOS Children's Village, because their parents had probably influenced them. The first few weeks were hard for me. I had to forbid a lot of



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things, because I had to create a basis and a framework, so that we could live together in this house and accept one another.

### ***Could you describe the children in more detail?***

They are delicate children who need care, security and esteem. When their parents come to visit, the children are happy and fidgety at the same time. They cry, shout, and sometimes even scream to get their parents' attention. Sometimes the situation gets out of control and I have problems when the visit is over, because the children's needs haven't been fulfilled.

All this stirs the children up, but how many things have we got through together already? The eldest couldn't manage to learn to read and write. We battled together for the best part of two years. Today he's proud, because he's now helping his little brother, who is having the same problems. His behaviour has changed. He used to think that it didn't matter what he did, he wouldn't succeed anyway. Today he knows that he only has to try. He doesn't always manage to succeed in the things that he wants to achieve, but isn't it also true that we learn from our mistakes?

The children need a lot of attention and security. Their behaviour can sometimes be quite astounding. Sometimes they're like little children and at others, they're like adults. You get the impression



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that they had to grow up too quickly. They skipped a number of stages and have been catapulted into the adult world at far too young an age.

### ***Could you describe each of your children's biggest talents?***

Michael is an open and generous child, who has a great thirst for knowledge. He's very good at maths and has an excellent memory. He's pleasant, attentive, often happy and isn't easily satisfied. Cindy expresses her feelings through drawing. She likes to help me cook. She's a quiet and pleasant child, who makes an effort to please other people and make them like her. She's finding school a bit difficult. Dylan is a very intelligent little boy. He can win people over. Despite his aggressive behaviour, he's agreeable and charming. Brenda is very mischievous, playful and happy. She likes to sing and makes up her own songs. She needs a lot of love and attention.

### ***What would you like to be able to give your children on their way in life?***

I'd like to be able to give them everything that a mother would want to give her own children. I think you have to be at one with yourself and have self-respect, in order to be able to deal with life successfully. We can achieve a lot in our lives, if the basis is laid early enough. I also think that schooling is very important for the children. These days, every child, no matter where he lives, should have the opportunity to learn to read and write.

One day, these children will return to their parents and, by that time, they should be independent. They should be able to enjoy the moment and the beautiful things in life. Little things such as a drawing, a gesture or a mannerism should give them pleasure.

I hope that I'll be able to give them something. At the same time, it's a mutual thing, because they give me a lot too. The SOS mother and SOS aunt have to receive something in return, so that they have the feeling that they're doing a good job. Then it's a very satisfying thing to be able to pass on your own knowledge and experience.



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### ***What has been the best experience with your children so far, and what has been the worst?***

The happiest day was the day my children arrived. Other good days are when the children are successful, for example, Michael winning at judo. Then there are the evenings where the children organise something for me. Equally lovely is when the children come back from their holidays and jump into my arms. I can feel that they haven't forgotten me.

Difficult times are when their relatives come to visit, and the following days. I can sense the tension and regret it when I'm cross with them. The hardest things are the care planning discussions and the uncertainty that goes with them, as to what decision will be made about the children. I find it hard to watch them suffer and feel powerless.

### **To My Colleagues Around the World**

I would like to meet you all so much, so that we could talk together. I would like to know whether you are different from me, but I do not think so. I have particular admiration for those SOS mothers who live in countries with economic and political difficulties and still devote themselves to others. What courage and what strength!

Our profession is sometimes not perceived well. People ask themselves why we do it. We are an ocean of love in this world of hate and violence; each of us is a drop of water in that ocean. That is our strength and our way of improving this world. It has to be done today, so that future generations can live in a better world. This organisation has been in existence for over fifty years, and that's why I think our mission is necessary. Why should these children not have the same rights as all other children? Why should they not experience the joy of living in a house, surrounded by their brothers and sisters, and with a mother, whose sole wish is to love them?



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Finally, I would like to quote the following: "Life does not require us to be the best, only to do our best."

## **Patricia on the Situation of Women in France**

All the people of France have the chance to determine their own lives. If a woman wants to work and make use of her abilities in the career world, she can. If she would rather stay at home and look after the children, that is also all right, assuming that she can afford to. However, the attitude still remains that housewives do nothing, and that bringing up children is not a difficult task. The term "housewife" remains a derogatory one. It describes a woman who has submitted herself, who has completely suppressed her femininity and only represents the motherly side of herself. This way of thinking should change. Housework should be taken as seriously as working elsewhere. Until now, women have not really had the opportunity to combine both. The tendency in France is to compartmentalise things and to judge each aspect individually. On the one hand, there are the women in the career world and, on the other, those who dedicate themselves entirely to bringing up their children. I have the feeling that these are two separate worlds; perhaps our society lacks the candour to combine them both.

I see myself precisely in the middle as an SOS mother: I have a profession and, at the same time, I live in a house that I consider my own. On the one hand, I have professional discussions with the psychologists, the village director and other co-workers and, on the other, I have relationships which are similar to those of a housewife, where we talk about shopping, clothes or food. It is interesting. I like having something of both worlds and, therefore, manage to achieve a balance.

## **SOS Children's Village Work in France**

The first SOS Children's Village to be built outside of Austria was in the northern French town of Busigny in 1956. Today, there are 14 SOS Children's Villages, including youth programmes and vocational training centres.



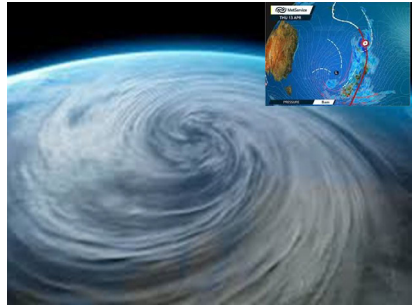
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# Postcard from Leon Fulcher

## *Postcard after Cyclones Debbie and Cook passed through New Zealand*

**K**ia Ora Everyone!  
Greetings everyone, from a soggy Bay of Plenty Region of New Zealand! Late in the first week of April, within a ten-day period, we were hit by the remnants of Tropical Cyclones Debbie and then Cook! While New Zealand didn't suffer like Queensland and New South Wales, we are still picking up the pieces but thankfully there were no deaths here! After thrashing Australia as a Category 4 cyclone, ex-tropical Cyclone Debbie moved across the Tasman Sea drenching New Zealand's Central North Island. The Bay of Plenty Region lived up to its name as eastern districts were deluged with rain. The more slowly developing Cyclone Cook moved south from the equatorial Pacific before slamming into the New Zealand's Central North Island in almost the same place as Debbie made landfall.



*The Eye of Tropical Cyclone Debbie bearing down on New Zealand*



*A Month's Rain hit New Zealand's Bay of Plenty in 24 hours*



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For those interested in the meteorological aspects of cyclones as compared with hurricanes, the simple thing to remember is that hurricanes happen in the Atlantic Ocean and cyclones happen in the Pacific. South of the equator, hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons spin clock-wise – with a lot of wind at the start of the rotation and rain at the back.

The township of Edgumbe and surrounding area has an unenviable history of natural disasters, with quakes, floods, and debris flows. The town lies on a flood plain and an active seismic zone. A little over 30 years ago, a 6.5-magnitude quake struck the town and region, at the time, the largest quake in New Zealand in 45 years. It dropped parts of the town and surrounding rural land by up to two metres, inviting the Rangitaiki River to flood. Families were rescued as flood waters rushed in - making me think of how fast New Orleans flooded. Just coping with the deluge of water was a challenge for everyone in every community in the path, our community included. Roads were blocked by fallen trees, landslides or slips, and also



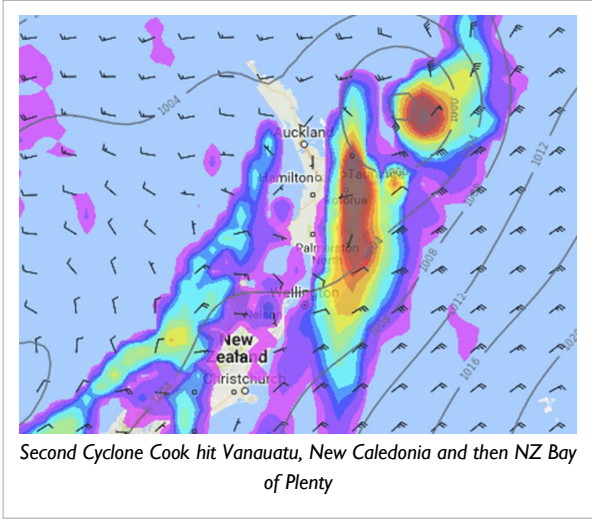
*Rangataiki River Stop Banks Broke and the town of Edgumbe was flooded*



*Rescue efforts in Edgumbe*



flooded with water, mud and silt. Elsewhere complete roads have been washed out. Power lines were knocked down and thousands of homes were without electricity or access. Schools were closed, shelters opened in community halls and two weeks after, some people are still being airlifted to hospital by helicopter from isolated communities. It was with some fear and anticipation that everyone watched weather reports about slow-moving Cyclone Cook as it worked its way towards New Zealand, tearing up Vanuatu and then New Caledonia although seemingly less destructive than Debbie. More wind; less rain. Ten days later and most people have power again, although some in remote locations are still reliant on



*Second Cyclone Cook hit Vanuatu, New Caledonia and then NZ Bay of Plenty*



*Roads washed out and utility lines broken*



generators. Most road slips and tree blockages were fixed in days but some roads – like our main road west – is completely washed out in two places – and is expected to remain closed for up to 3 months and add hours to journeys from Auckland or Rotorua!

So what does all this have to do with child and youth care? First, child and youth care is a community-oriented way of being with, and sharing life spaces with children, young people and families. Second, every emergency shelter taking in families has to recognise that flooding and natural disasters are traumatising – the longer the upheaval – the experience is more traumatising. Fifth, schools are closed and kids need purposeful activities to keep them focused on daily moments and relationships. Finally, what will they find back home?



*Major power outages throughout the Bay of Plenty and then Hawke's Bay Region*



*State Highway 38 is closed for 2-3 months, isolating Ruatahuna Valley people*





# Information

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CYC-Online (ISSN 1605-7406) is an open-access ejournal published monthly by [The CYC-Net Press](#)

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**Leon Fulcher** – Transformation, New Zealand

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- The style of a paper is up to the author
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- We are willing to work with first-time authors to help them get published
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Full page	\$250.00	\$200.00	\$150.00	\$100.00
½ page	\$200.00	\$150.00	\$120.00	\$90.00
¼ page	\$125.00	\$100.00	\$75.00	\$50.00

*Prices in US\$ per monthly issue, per insertion. Full amount payable at first insertion. Deadline: 7 days before month-end*

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All artwork to be sent to [admin@cyc-net.org](mailto:admin@cyc-net.org)

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