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 201 / November 2015

The CYC-Net PRESS

Contents

Where Will the Next Centennial Take Us?

Over the past month four young people in the local community where I live and work ended their lives by suicide. One overdosed on medications, another by gunshot, and two by hanging. Most of the general public has no idea of the pain and complicated circumstances behind these tragedies.

People like you who read *CYC-Online* know what it can be like. A young person struggles through daily life at school feeling like both peers and adults are relentlessly on their back. A teenager on the street wonders if anyone really cares and cries out for help by hurting himself. A family member is overcome with pain and worry, unsure if their support for a loved one is making a difference.

Child and Youth Care Practitioners like you are there in these painful moments. We are there when the answers and future are unclear for those who are struggling. We are there when someone begins to take their first step – sometimes a physical step and sometimes a first step toward hope.

CYC-Online, as it always has, continues to celebrate the diversity and breadth of our field. We find each other in residential homes, hospitals, schools, neighborhoods, community centers, and on the streets. We are academics and practitioners, visionaries and realists. We show up when we are scheduled and we hang in during the unscheduled. We are a powerful force in the world both for the present and the future. We are only outdone by the resilience, strength, and potential of the young people and families we are honored to work alongside.

Last month we celebrated the 200th issue of *CYC-Online* and it was a beautiful accomplishment for our field. (If you haven't read it yet, you can still catch up – all the back issues are available at www.cyc-net.org)

This issue – number 201 – marks the beginning of our next centennial. What sort of difference will we make in the world in the years to come? Will you write and contribute a column this year? Will you read the monthly issues and spread the word to your colleagues? Will you contribute financially as you are able to ensure the journal continues? How many lives will be impacted by our field when issue 300 rolls around somewhere around the beginning of 2024?

In our daily work with young people and families we are – together – creating a more hopeful future for the world. The four lost lives in my community – and every young person in pain – remind us that this is our time and our role is essential. I am glad to be in this journey with you.

– **James**

Stuff That Never Happens... (when you live in care)

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Over the past few weeks I have had a lot of occasion to speak with people involved in residential services; professionals of various stripes, including social workers, psychologists, doctors, administrators, and yes, also child and youth care practitioners. At the same time, I have had the opportunity to be with, listen to, and discuss the experience of living in care with a large number of young people. There is a lot that I could report on in relation to all of these encounters. Certainly I could talk about the enormous disconnect between what professionals muse about, and what young people actually want to talk about. But I don't want to get ahead of myself; I will report on my current work related to residential services in Ontario in due time. What I really want to do this month is to provide a list of stuff that never happens for young people who live in care (especially group care). This list is by no means exhaustive, and there may be exceptions for this young person or that one, but here are 20 things that are outside of the everyday experience of being young and living in care; I leave it to you to make meaning out of this list.

1. You never get a kiss on the cheek;
2. You can't be in a rotten mood without consequence;
3. You can't spontaneously hang out with some friends without a plan;
4. You can't spontaneously arrange a sleepover with a new friend;

5. You can't stay in bed all day and just be lazy, not even once per year;
6. You can't not be accountable;
7. If you need to sit on the toilet, the seat is never clean;
8. You never get furniture in your room that fits your personality;
9. You'll never have a key to the house in which you live;
10. You can't light candles;
11. You can't walk around in your house in your underwear;
12. Even if your 17, you can't just take a Tylenol if you have a headache;
13. You can't go to bed at night with certainty about who will wake you up in the morning;
14. You can't change up your daily routine;
15. Dinner won't be an outrageously unhealthy meal that tastes awesome;
16. Dinner won't be culturally appropriate for you every day; only on days when it's your culture's turn;
17. You almost certainly can't have a pet that doesn't live in a cage or aquarium or terrarium;
18. You'll never be home alone, and therefore you'll never have a chance to really crank the tunes, to smuggle in a girl or boyfriend, to eat ice cream without permission and various other misdeeds;
19. You almost certainly won't spend Christmas (or other special holidays) with the people who care for you every day;
20. You are never more than one appointment away from a new diagnosis, new meds, and a new label.

When Is a Bush No Longer a Bush?

Andy Leggett

I was robbed recently!

Well, not perhaps in the standard "stick 'em up" way, but... still ...

My family and I were recently awakened at two in the morning by a loud banging at our front door.

My wife, Darlene, was the first to the front window and saw three teenage boys hiding behind one of our cars.

Moments later, armed with a flashlight, I went outside to investigate. All seemed clear until, when returning to the house, I shone the light at a large bush that colourfully decorates the corner of our house, just feet from our front door. One of the teenagers, a rather large young man, had been hiding behind it and darted from the bush and ran down the street, startling me.

I returned to the house and watched for a while from the front window after my family had gone back to bed. While sitting there, I looked down at the large flashlight that I had carried out with me. It was just one of those large long tubular flashlights similar to what you see police carrying in TV drama shows.

Now, here comes the "robbery" part ...

It had just been a flashlight before.

Now, it was something else.

I realized that the flashlight which I was still clutching in my hand was no longer just a handy, helpful, bedside tool in case the lights went out. It was now also a formidable weapon to use should intruders threaten my home.

And I was surprised at the horror and

comfort I felt simultaneously at the thought of that.

Horror in that I have never been much of a "weapons" guy – it should be illegal for me to be even considered for carrying a firearm. I have been able to find my way through many precarious situations without having to worry about accidently stabbing myself repeatedly with a sharp object.

But I had to admit that, at that moment, it felt good having that big stick in my hand.

No ... not good ... safe ... er ...

And since that night, I will never again view that flashlight as just a benign, "helpful, handy" tool. I even noticed that I just wrote "armed with a flashlight" at the start of this column!

Similarly, what used to be a decorative bush at the side of the house, nicely framing the flower beds that provide such an aesthetically pleasing touch to our home, was now a potential hiding place for intruders. It's pretty flowers a distraction from the potential dangers lurking behind the dense and tall foliage.

It left me wondering if I would always now subconsciously check the bush before entering and leaving my home.

The bush was no longer just a bush.

This one small isolated incident changed how I saw certain things in the world.

But what if there WAS someone hiding behind that bush every day, threatening the safety of me and my family every time we came in or left? And there was no one to help other than me? How would that change how I lived my life, how I viewed the world? How I entered and left my home? How I felt before entering and leaving my home? Would I not always carry that flashlight? And not likely benignly?

Aren't most of the children with whom we work similarly "robbed"?

Isn't that what happens to so many of the children and youth with whom we work? Especially those who experience terror and abuse virtually every day of their lives?

A nine year old was once placed in a foster home. All went well for the first week; so well so that the foster parent decided to reward the young man with a surprise trip to McDonalds for lunch. Immediately upon pulling into the parking lot, the young man "lost it", yelling and punching to the point that the foster parent had to call me to get some support to get the young man home. It took us over a day to get him to the point that he could talk and interact with us at all.

It turns out that his parents would take him to McDonalds after abusing him ... as a reward for "being such a good boy".

Also where his Child Welfare Worker took him to tell him he was moving from his last "forever foster home" and he would not be returning.

To this young man, McDonald's was no longer McDonald's.

Might that be why they respond so "inappropriately"? Make such a big deal out of nothing? "Freak out" and over-react to the smallest thing? Engage in those irritating and annoying "attention-seeking" behaviours whose sole purpose we are convinced is to aggravate us? Act so

"weird" in certain situations? Blow everything out of proportion? Can't plan ahead and consider the consequences of their actions?

Because, for so many of them, there is someone always lurking behind that pretty bush.

They can't help but begin to perceive the world differently from us. They can't help but begin to perceive things, people, behaviours, emotions, situations, tastes, smells, differently from us.

Foster Carers homes and families, to us, look warm, inviting, pleasant, welcoming – much like the bush in front of my house.

To the children and youth whom we are intent on welcoming into the foster home, it is just one more trap.

Foster Carers provide children and youth with the many skills and tools they need to learn, interact with others, be helpful – much like a flashlight.

To the children and youth, the pretty bush is always a danger ... and the benign flashlight always a weapon of protection.

A foster parent took a 13 year old Amanda, who had been recently placed with her, to a church Christmas function, a church that her family had been attending for generations, and was amazed at how well she interacted with members of the church.

Until the next day, when people who had attended the function began arriving at the foster home with casseroles and Christmas gifts.

Amanda had been able to convince everyone at the church function that the foster family was struggling financially and did not have enough money to buy food and presents.

It would have been easy for the foster mother to be outraged and embarrassed and punished Amanda for "lying" and "manipulating".

But the foster mother saw it differently.

She learned that Amanda's experience had been that she couldn't rely on the adults in her life to meet her needs.

And on a recent Christmas, her mother had pawned all the Christmas gifts the week before Christmas to pay some gambling and drug debts.

Amanda had been able to use her incredibly well developed survival skills to ensure that HER needs were met during Christmas.

So you can imagine Amanda's surprise when no punishment followed, no lecture ensued, no placement change

Instead, the foster mother was able to talk about how those behaviours in the past had worked to keep her safe and meet her needs. And boy, was she ever good at it!

The foster mother then mused, wondering if now these behaviours that used to keep Amanda safe now might get in the way of getting her needs met.

And wondered if it was possible that some things could change and Amanda might be able to begin to trust adults ... a little.

And let's work on that together.

Isn't our job to understand that?

Isn't our job to try to see the world the way they perceive it to be?

Oh ... and anyone want to buy a flashlight?

RESIDENTIAL CHILD AND YOUTH CARE IN A DEVELOPING WORLD

Tuhinul Islam & Leon Fulcher

The CYC-Net PRESS

Residential Child and Youth Care in a Developing World builds from a critique of Courtney, M. E. & Iwaniec, D. (Eds). (2009). *Residential Care of Children: Comparative Perspectives* (Oxford University Press) which evaluated de-instiutionalisation policies in the residential care of children in 11 countries. It also builds on the comparative efforts of Whittaker, del Valle & Holmes (2015) *Therapeutic Residential Care for Children and Youth: Developing Evidence-Based International Practice.* We started from an intellectual claim that residential child and youth care "places" exist everywhere – whether called homes, orphanages, schools, centres or institutions. Unlike Courtney & Iwaniec or Whittaker et al, we include private boarding schools, madrassa and other religious learning centres in our definition of residential child and youth care. Residential establishments involve any building(s) (and sometimes tents) where children or young people are brought together to live in shared community life spaces for given periods of time, whether as refugees of war, poverty, disease, abuse, famine or natural disaster.

Residential Child and Youth Care in a Developing World represents a unique comparative research effort in its time and place with 69 contributors already submitted from 62 countries where care has received limited attention in the literature. FIFA world regions have been used to group contributions for publication purposes. Each contribution builds on an historic legacy of story-telling about child and youth care practices in different places, by different peoples. An overwhelming response has already yielded a diverse and unique range of stories about triumph and turbulence in the provision of residential care and education for children world-wide.

Volume 1 – Residential Child and Youth Care in a Developing World: Global Perspectives (December 2015)
Volume 2 – Residential Child and Youth Care in a Developing World: Asian and Middle East Perspectives (February 2016)
Volume 3 – Residential Child and Youth Care in a Developing World: African Perspectives (April 2016)
Volume 4 – Residential Child and Youth Care in a Developing World: European Perspectives June 2016)

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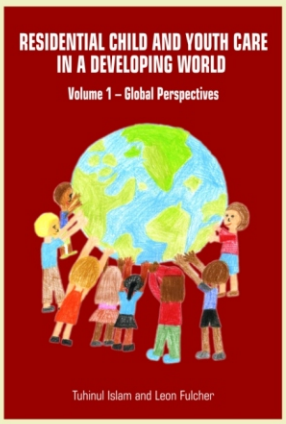

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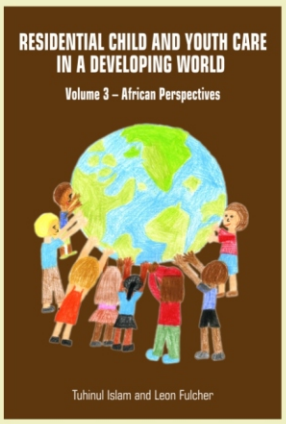

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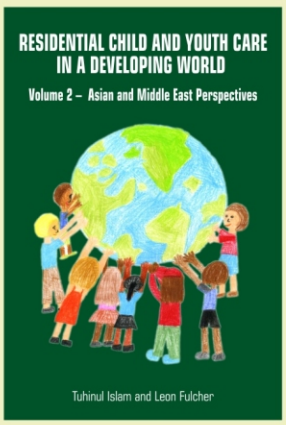

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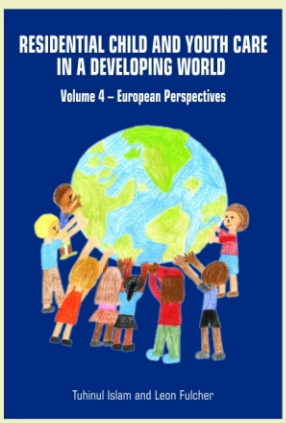

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When is a program not a program?

Jack Phelan

Residential CYC programs are an intensive, expensive, intrusive and exclusive places. They are organized to provide a completely organic and overarching reality for the residents with a very controlled and often minimal allowance for influence from the communities which surrounded the residents prior to admission. Bronfenbrenner would shake his head at how we sanitize and disengage the natural eco-system of these youths as we attempt to create a more useful, therapeutic life space to create change for the better in our residents.

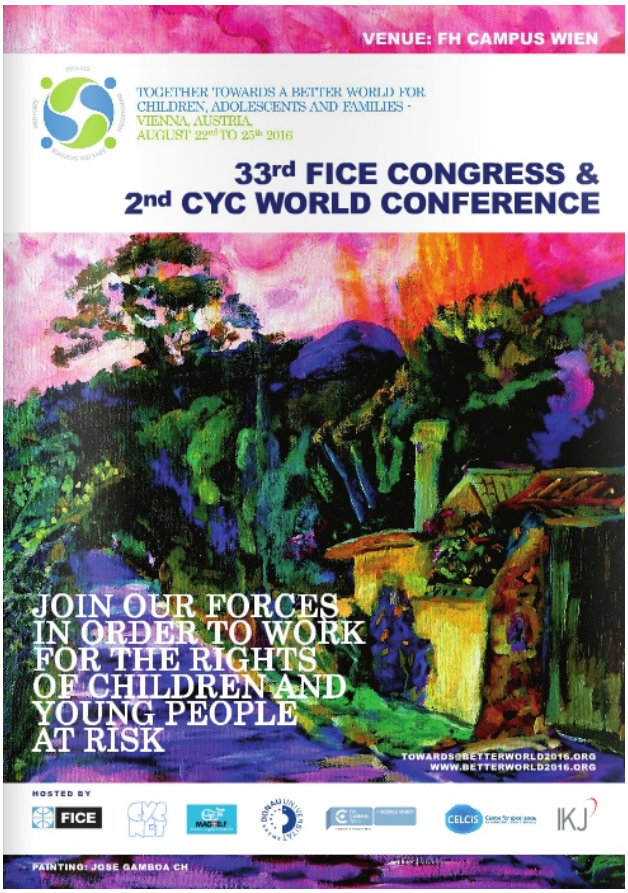
The pool of referrals to these programs is quite exclusive, since almost all of our residents have experienced both neglect and abuse in their young lives. The developmental consequences of these life experiences have seriously impacted the healthy developmental journeys of our charges, and this is probably the single largest factor impeding their ability to be successful in leading manageable lives. In fact, the ego-centric, survival oriented world view that results from early abuse and neglect is probably the common theme that negatively impacts each of the youth. An exclusive bunch indeed.

The program focus for most is to create a safe, predictable environment that can manage the sometimes destructive and impulsive behavior that arises and to create responsible behaviour in the youth. The method to achieve this is to have rules, routines, activities and environmental controls that will support the daily events that occur. Staff members will be trained to create a predictable, safe and well organized living situation where expectations are set by the program for all the residents, sometimes individualized, other times standardized. Safety and control are the main dynamics and behavior that challenges safety and good order is discouraged by external control. Indeed, not much treatment can occur in an unsafe environment and useful programs are safe programs first.

Rules, routines, activities and environmental controls are the outline or bare bones of a treatment program and really

do not by themselves deliver much incentive to learn and change. In fact, safety does not create learning, it just creates safety. It sets up the possibility of learning and supports learning, but only if there is some kind of learning curriculum introduced. When the only learning offered is based on how to be successful in this exclusive, intrusive, expensive and intensive environment, there will not be much that can be successfully taken home to the natural eco-system of each youth. Well organized living spaces and behaviorally compliant youth may seem to be a good goal to strive for, but there is little useful learning happening.

A safety program is not a treatment program, it is just a safety program. It can be organized and run by hard working control oriented people and actually looks useful to outsiders, but such an intensive, intrusive, expensive and exclusive attempt to be helpful should have better goals than this.



The Real "Money in the Bank": Building Relationships in Child and Youth Care

Frank Delano

One of the many things I have cherished since becoming increasingly connected to the international Child and Youth Care community over the years is the wonderful shared importance placed on the rhythms, ceremonies and traditions of our work. When I was asked to write an article for the 200th edition of *CYC-Online* I felt appropriately honored and wanted to pick an apropos topic to write about. That turned into quite a struggle for me. I guess over the years I have become most recognized in the Child and Youth Care world for my work, presentations,, and writings on supervision and leadership, but somehow I kept procrastinating in deciding on a topic and this one did not make it for the 200th edition. I remembered that when the Indian author Arundhati Roy was heavily pressured to write another novel after her earth shaking "The God of Small Things" she said that these subjects were her passion and she could not write another work "until it just dances out of me". The importance of quality supervision for Child and Youth

Care workers is certainly a passion of mine, but since nothing was "dancing out of me" I decided to approach it by thinking of what the primary foundation of my entire career has been (inclusive of supervision)…and finally the idea "danced out".

Long before I put a label on it the foundational core that has guided my work with children, and my belief system about our work, is what I now refer to as "Money in the Bank". Of course, it is not the legal tender version of money, but the relational money that we can deposit with a child based on building positive relationships, respect, genuine caring, and continually refining "the art" of our work with children. Without any education in Child and Youth Care, and with no experience working with children, from my first day in the field as a direct Child and Youth Care worker I instinctively understood this work was primarily relational above all else.

I first used the actual "Money in the Bank" label when I became the Associate Director of a very large residential treatment center near New York City. I had been the Director of the adolescent girls' program for two years prior to that. In that unit we had been successful in creating a non-violent culture and fully eliminating restraints of children. However, in moving into the larger position within the agency I was inheriting overview of three boys' units where the number of restraints were still astronomically high. As a way to send a strong message that restraining children was not an acceptable practice I decided to teach the Cornell Therapeutic Crisis Intervention course myself, along with a direct service Child and Youth Care worker. This would allow for the message of restraint reduction/elimination and the emphasis on a relational approach to be coming straight from the program executive level. I originally described "Money in the Bank" in that course as building relationship currency with a child so there was something to "draw out" in times of crisis. I would explain that many times when a child would be escalating in crisis a Child and Youth Care worker would walk in on it and the mood would come right down to a calmer level. Other workers would walk in and the mood would immediately get more agitated. I theorized this was not about the position of the stars that day. It was more about how much the 'relational money' the worker had deposited with the child that created a certain level of safety for the child. That sense of safety could help them calm down just by the worker's presence.

The philosophy and term were very attractive to many of our higher caliber workers and before long "Money in the Bank" became part of the agency culture. The term would be used regularly among workers and in meetings. As time went on I became more aware of how often when we built a relationship with a child we would be frustrated by not always seeing the healthy growth in the child we hoped for while they were still in the program. It occurred to me how often a child would leave the program and workers would feel

pessimistic about that child's future. Then, perhaps years later, the child would get back in touch with the worker and be doing quite well in life. They would so often refer to something the worker said or did in the moment (many times the worker did not even remember it) that always stuck with them as a guiding force in their life. I then expanded the "Money in the Bank" concept to include the idea that any relationship money we deposit stays there after the child leaves the program and is there for them to "draw out" at various times later in life. In trying to define the art of "Money in the Bank" I suggest:

"Money in the Bank" is the relationship money a Child and Youth Care worker "deposits" with a child in the continuous course of being with that child. The sense of safety and trust this "relationship money" builds may be drawn out in a crisis time to help a child compose themselves, or simply stay with the children when they leave care to be drawn out many years later.

It is widely accepted that those of us who choose to dedicate our life's work to Child and Youth Care are not likely to make a lot of money and become rich in the monetary sense. But, I think we also know how much "richer" we are than most because of the many precious moments we experience when we build positive relationships with the children we work with. It is, for us, the real "Money in the Bank". There are many ways get rich in this way and I will outline a few below. Since Child and Youth Care work is so much about relationships, and there are so many "stories" that capture key moments in our work, I will illustrate a number of ways a Child and Youth Care worker can put "Money in the Bank" with a child by sharing some reflections below.

Be a $7 for $5 worker

Bill Russell played 13 years for the Boston Celtics. His team won 11 National Basketball Association championships during that period and he was clearly the centerpiece of those teams. He was very gifted athletically, but was not the best physical athlete in the sport and was often outsized at his position. When asked what the key to his unrivaled success in being a key player in winning championships was he said simply "When I was young my father told me "Son, when a man pays you $5 for a day's work you always give him $7 worth of work". Child and Youth Care workers who want to deposit money in the bank should strive to be that 7 for 5 worker. In a speech given to new Child and Youth Care Workers in Durban, Ernie Nightingale (2000) spoke of the importance of the commitment to "hang in there" when times are tough. He said that some of the best Child and Youth Care workers he knew had understood the importance of this kind of commitment in their practice and prioritized it. One special example of a $7 for $5 commitment would be a story that involves Holly, a girl who lived the in residential unit I was Director of back in the 1980's. Holly got back in touch after some years and she

and I connected to co-train a workshop on "Money in the Bank" (by then she was in her late 30's and very stable in life with a successful career). The training was set up to take a look at how this "relational money" was viewed by her as a 16-year-old in the program and me as Director back then as well as how she and I viewed it presently. The audience included both Child and Youth Care workers and teenage girls in care from a similar unit to hers when she was in our program. In an unrehearsed moment I asked her to share a particular example of a way that a worker made a "large deposit" with her. She recalled Margaret as her favorite Child and Youth Care worker. Margaret was the senior worker in that cottage. She worked a full time job in the business world and then five nights a week from 5:30pm to midnight as a Child and Youth Care worker. She had a "tough" exterior with very strict rules about respect and keeping a clean house. However, the girls also knew she was also "a softie" inside. She was able to nurture and show love to the girls long before we dared put that word to it in Child and Youth Care. Holly shared that she felt very safe with Margaret and sometimes when the overnight worker was new, or not reliable, she would purposely create a crisis in the unit so that Margaret would have to stay past midnight to help the other worker settle everyone down. She would then spend time to talk to Holly to settle her down. By that time, with Margaret's presence, the rest of the girls were sleeping and Holly could feel safer with the overnight person there.

When I asked Holly what made that so special she simply said "Margaret never once looked at her watch during those times". Voila, "Money in the Bank"! There are many other ways a worker can show the kind of commitment to earn the reputation with children as a $7 for $5 worker. These might include coming in a half hour early (even without getting paid!) on days where a big recreation trip is happening to be sure all was prepared, bringing in a special homemade treat for a unit party, being willing to "risk your practice" some by being extra reflective in a supervision session about your struggles as a way to grow professionally, etc.

Believe in "the goodness of kids"

I believe one of the best developments in Child and Youth Care practice over the past number of years has been more and more programs establishing a focused "strengths based" philosophy of care. Training workers to think and respond in a 'strengths'- based way will have many positive impacts. A key one is that much "money in the bank" can be deposited by a genuine belief on the Child and Youth Care worker's part in the "goodness of kids". One of the more poignant and heart-wrenching reminders of the importance of this came a couple of years ago when Jill Shah and I were asked to visit a 30-day Youth Shelter program in Texas to make recommendations on how they could improve their services and adopt a "control to collaboration" process in working with youth in the shelter. The

program was in deep trouble at the time and someone at a senior management level was temporarily coming down a number of organizational levels to take over the shelter to stabilize it. Their mission talked of a having a "home like environment" for kids between placements. After a day of visiting the program in action, as well as interviewing staff and kids, we suggested to the senior manager the best place to start the transition was to hear clearly that in the full day there we didn't see even one "home-like" thing in the program. The senior manager was a very sound professional. She took that very well and was even more motivated for change. Of course, we couldn't bring that particular opinion to all of the staff without (possibly) insulting them beyond repair. However, we did need to grab their attention at the end of day one. During the day in an interview with one of the 15 year old girls we asked her: "What is the one biggest thing you want to leave with from this program? What is most important to you as a person? What will you want to look back on in twenty years about your time here at the shelter?" This tough-looking girl whom the staff described as needy and sometimes greedy about concrete things had tears well up in her eyes and said very thoughtfully, with a painful sadness, "Well, it hasn't happened yet in my 20 days here, but I would like for just once, only one time, the adults here not to believe I'll do the wrong thing". After the tears dried up in our eyes we brought that example to the table at the end of day summary with all the staff. It was the one thing that grabbed the most of their attention. "Someone believes in me" is a message that will lead to a deposit of a fortune of "money in the bank".

Being "present in the moment"

As Holly's story shows so clearly, youth find it extremely important for the Child and Youth Care worker to be "present in the moment" (Masson, 2000). VanderVen (1991) points out that one of the things that makes Child and Youth Care work so special and unique is the work done in the "life-space" of the child. I remember Thom Garfat, in an informal discussion, talking about how important it was for Child and Youth Care workers to notice those "bids for connections" that youth will make. The Child and Youth Care worker has to consistently be present in the moment to notice those "bids" and much money can be deposited

in the relational bank from noticing them. Of course, many youth in care show these bids in ways that may be aggressive, somewhat anti-social looking, appearing disinterested, with loud talking when the worker is talking to another close by, etc. It is important the worker notice the bid and later seek the child out and invite them to talk about it in a private space. Just the fact the worker noticed the bid puts a deposit in the bank and much "money" can be added by showing the child an interest in understanding what it meant. I remember once on a recreation trip asking a youth who was normally shy and very cooperative to sit in the row behind me in the van on the way back to the center. When entering the van he went right by that seat, ignoring my instructions, and sat in the back row. I let it go and the next day asked him what that was about. He apologized and told me he had a crush on one of the girls on the trip, had been too afraid to talk with her, and when he saw an empty seat by her he decided to sit near her. As a reminder of what mindset being in residential care can create in a child he then asked if he was in trouble. I assured him he was not and asked how it went with the girl. He said he still didn't talk with her in the van. That led to a twenty-minute talk between us about ideas on how he could approach her again. He profusely thanked me for my advice after the discussion (I don't remember if he got the girl in the end though!).

Don't forget your sense of humor

Nancy was a girl in our program who came into my office one day to ask if I could help her with spelling and grammar in a letter she was writing to "her judge" back in her hometown. She explained the judge had a special interest in her and she wanted to write to him. I replied of course and was feeling quite joyful she was being this responsible. She quickly said "Ok, I'll just leave it with you", and left almost before it was fully in my hand. I was busy and put the letter aside for an hour. When I read it I was startled. She was telling the judge she didn't need to be in residential treatment, how all the other girls were "crazy", and how awful it was for a Director (me) for not recognizing this. She went on for a paragraph or two questioning my intelligence, my knowledge, whether I ever worked with kids before this, etc., etc. A day later she came back in my office sheepishly, apparently realizing her strategy to give the letter to me may not have been the wisest. "Where is that letter?" she asked carefully. I told her she had done a pretty good job with composing it, I had made some corrections and asked if she needed a stamp to mail it. I thought she would faint, then she gave me the strangest look, and walked out with the letter (and three stamps). When the judge called me to follow up I arranged a meeting for the three of us to discuss it. When I told her of the meeting she probably thought she would be in trouble for the things she said about me in the letter. When the meeting began we both complimented

Nancy on her ability to express herself. We said we were happy we were both considered such important people in her life. We agreed if she was that unhappy we would arrange for her to have a second meeting with her social worker, Child and Youth Care worker, and her parents to review the placement decision and look at how we could help her better. The look on her face was precious: "Money in the Bank"!

Avoid the "compliance trap"

When facilitating a training with Child and Youth Care staff who work in "shift" settings I can often get large smiles when mentioning those end of shift program logs that say "Good shift, no problems". I usually suggest that it probably meant "Good shift, I wasn't looking closely". Just the nature of bringing together sometimes as many as twenty youth working through daily issues in the same space for eight hours suggests the road will not be that smooth. In far too many cases the Child and Youth Care worker starts to judge his or her own abilities and competence by "how well the kids behave". This is often compounded by point systems, supervisor or agency philosophies that subtly (or not so subtly) have a primary focus of rewarding workers and youth for how compliant the youth are in regard to program rules, adult directions, etc. Of course, there has to be safety in the life-space for youth and Child and Youth Care workers. A certain level of order is necessary for the program to function consistently, but sliding into an over-focus on compliance can be all too seductive as a way to judge success for the worker or for growth in a child. I have always loved Lorraine Fox's (1994) position that sees compliance as a potential catastrophe in providing quality treatment for youth. She points out that the willingness to comply for many youth who have been sexually abused, follow negative peers, etc. it was their inability not to comply that brought them into a situation where they were needing care. There was a girl who I worked with as Director of a residential unit named Maria. She was a girl who was sometimes significantly depressed, had self-destructive tendencies, and most often took out her anger on herself and not outwardly on others. She was a very popular girl with all in the program as she was extremely polite and "compliant" with most rules. She graduated high school with us, went to university, and kept in touch. She has an excellent job now and recently invited me to dinner to meet her husband and two teenaged children in a

restaurant in Spanish Harlem in New York City. Of course, we were reminiscing and telling stories at dinner. When it was my turn I told a story that surprised her. After sharing with her children what a polite and sensitive person their Mom was as a teenager, I said I did remember a time when she cursed in my office. Maria looked surprised, perhaps a bit annoyed, and said she did not remember it. I assured her kids she did not do this much and it was the only time I ever heard her curse out loud. The kids looked at each other and said playfully "You should hear her now!" I told them Mom came in my office where her social worker and a Child and Youth Care worker were also present about two months before she was leaving after three years in the program. She blurted out how angry she was with something we had decided, hurled a few classic curse words into the air, and stormed out. I asked Maria if she knew what we did when she left the office. She said "You must have been disappointed". I laughed and said "Not at all, we clapped for you". She looked puzzled and asked why. I explained that we all appreciated her being well behaved so often, but real growth for her was to stop taking her anger out inwardly on herself and let it out more … and she had just done that in grand fashion! She started to tear-up a little and said "You all really did understand me".

Welcome them "home" and remember the importance of "meaning making"

We would probably all agree that it is crucial to make a child entering a program on the first day to feel welcomed, that they will be safe there, that we will care for them, and we would hopefully be able to make it as much a home-like atmosphere as possible. A big smile came to my face when I first read Kiaras Gharabaghi's (2010) wonderfully provocative article "Three Profoundly Stupid Ideas". In the article Kiaras points out some of the many things we, as Child and Youth Care practitioners and agencies, continue to buy into, and sometimes can even see as normal, when if we took a small step back we could easily see how illogical they are in helping youth grow healthily and improve their self-esteem. The article put words and a framework to something I always realized in my career although I was not always fully innocent of such profoundly stupid things myself. I was not always able to avoid them in my direct interactions with kids or change them in a program (even as a senior manager) because of how ingrained they can become in every-day life for us and children. Putting significant "money in the bank" with kids entails being aware when these profoundly stupid things are happening, acknowledging them, and working to change them. One primary example would be how often a child is not treated anything like being "welcomed home" when returning from a run-away event or AWOL (the term makes me cringe every time it is used, it is not a military setting!). Many times when a youth leaves the program they are hurting or angry, they put themselves in a situation that may be unsafe for an extended period. They ultimately make a good decision to return to the safety of the program. Far

too often they are greeted with a scowling worker who expresses disappointment they left and did not try to work the issue out in the program. They are then handed a consequence for their "bad behavior". I have always felt a "profoundly brilliant idea" would be to throw them, and the entire living unit, a party when they return; complete with ice cream and cake. This would be a "welcome home" message that would say we are glad you made a good decision, you are safe, and now we will do what we are paid for (and hopefully came into the field for) and try to help you work through the issues that got you to the point of leaving. Consequences are very deeply ingrained in many programs so I was never able to produce the actual party even as a Director in a program with generally excellent and forward thinking workers. However, I did produce a unique approach for our agency that opened up the bank for much larger "deposits". We added a rule that if a girl wrote a letter before she went AWOL she would get only half the normal consequence on return. If she called us while she was away to tell us she was safe another 50% consequence reduction was put in place. It took a lot to convince the skeptical staff this was a good idea. Although I couldn't move them away from all consequences we did agree there should be a special relational focus to make the girl as welcomed and nurtured as possible upon return. This was not so hard because for most of them it was their instinctive approach to the work, separate from these profoundly stupid ideas we get trapped in. The skeptics got an early boost as some of the first letters said things like "Dear Frank. I am going AWOL. I am tired of this place. I am going home and will probably hang out with my friends for a day or two. I'll return on Sunday, or maybe Monday if I am having a good time. Oh, and don't forget Frank, half my consequence for this note". I just gritted my teeth, took a deep breath, and honored our commitment to her! As pointed out earlier in this article putting "money in the bank" entails believing in kids. Over time, when the girls realized the caring here was legitimate many of the letters started to be very different. Some of them read:

"I am going AWOL because that worker got me so angry I would have punched them so hard in the face if they kept badgering me. I am on probation and I might go to jail if I did that. I want to control my temper better but can't."

"I left because my uncle is getting out of prison this week. My aunt and mother are very frightened because he would hit my aunt and sometimes hurt the kids. I had a good relationship with him so I think I can talk to him to help my mother and aunt."

"I am going AWOL because you people are stupid. I need to go into a drug re-hab program and my social worker doesn't believe me. I am going to try to get my mother to take me for an evaluation herself."

Do any of the above three examples sound like it was poor decision-making or "bad behavior" that should be given a consequence?? The amount of information to enhance our work with these girls after this was exponential. More importantly the girls across the unit were getting a sense they were really being "heard" when they were upset. Krueger (1998) points out the importance for us to consider "meaning making" of our work. Garfat and Fulcher (2011) framed the practice of meaning making as one of the 25 foundational elements of a Child and Youth Care approach. In the case of our journey of viewing the response to AWOL's in our program as a way to capitalize on putting as much "money in the bank" as possible with the girls we had to self-reflect, with "meaning making", very carefully about our responses to the girls for this behavior. We had to minimize our interpretation of it being "acting out" and conceptualize it as a possible good decision in tough circumstances as well as an opportunity to make a relational deposit.

Engage, Collaborate and Nurture after Crisis

When one considers the life experiences so many of the children we work with have had before coming into our programs we can only imagine how much rejection they have experienced. I have often said that if we do nothing else in our work (though hoping we do much more), we should not reject a child or express disappointment in them after an event where they have displayed very challenging behavior. That is what so many others have done in similar circumstances, so what a golden opportunity it might be to put "money in the bank" by nurturing them after a crisis incident.

I spent much of my career trying to avoid performing physical restraints of children myself. I also highly prioritized restraint reduction/elimination in programs I directed, as well as advocating for restraint reductions while serving on the national Residential Advisory Board of Child Welfare League of America. However, there were sometimes other realities to our work very early in my career and on some occasions I found myself in a position to try my best to enact a safe restraint of a child. I believe strongly that physical restraints, no matter how much we try to justify them, have the impact of placing major unproductive "withdrawals" on our money in the bank with a child. I also have a strong belief, and have commented in a previous article, (Delano, 2000) that a restraint of a child can never be considered best practice. It should not be considered a "last resort therapeutic

intervention" but rather a "therapeutic failure". It does not necessarily mean the worker "failed", but that the after-restraint focus should be to assess whether the program doesn't have enough resources to care for children without restraining, and if they are using the ones they have wisely. One strategy after any crisis is to use Redl and Wineman's Life Space Interview (1959). In the part where the worker is exploring the child's perception of reality in the incident I always added a modification where I would gently interrupt the child and say "We have talked about your behavior a lot. Let's talk about mine in this incident. What could I have done better?" In my years as a direct service Child and Youth Care worker in a cottage there was a boy named Robert. For whatever it is worth Robert's IQ was in the mid 60's. He was a very chubby boy, had very low esteem, and often had mucus running from his nose. He was very clingy and generally pleasant to adults but when he 'lost it' he had very little ability to "talk it out". Hence, Robert had to be restrained a number of times. He was large and round so they were difficult restraints to do alone (and yes, that was the norm back then). My co-worker was the cottage manager Miss Rose. She was a strict, but nurturing, woman who lived in an apartment in the same building with the kids. She would come to work in heels and a dress most days. The kids highly respected her and saw her as a mother figure, and she was not doing any restraints. So I, the athletic, younger one, had that "honor". I would often end up bruised after one with Robert. Each time I restrained Robert he was very sad afterwards. Miss Rose would leave me with the rest of the kids after the incident and take Robert out for a hamburger. I respected her skills and knowledge, but I was the one that was bruised! This went on a couple of times and when I finally expressed my concerns with this she brushed it off saying "He must be fed". After one or two more restraints I raised it in supervision with the Director and he said he would handle it. After two more restraints for Frank, and then hamburgers for Robert and Miss Rose, I went back to him to see what happened in his discussion with her. He said "I tried to talk with her but she just looked at me and said he must be fed! She is too valuable for me to mess with on this so I left it alone". Unrelated to this, both Miss Rose and I moved on the other programs a few months later. Robert went home to live with his family. At a campus graduation ceremony three years later he returned to campus to visit. He was much slimmer with smart suit on, had a big smile on his face, and even had a job running messages up and down stairs in a company near his home. Just when I was savoring this, Miss Rose walked over, elbowed me gently in the ribs, and said "He must be fed!" At that point the art of our work hit me and what Miss Rose was doing magically made so much sense. I am not sure if research would bear it out but the art of our work told me while she never articulated it, the hamburgers were Robert's "life space interview". He would be very sad and had so little capacity to talk the issues through

after the restraint it would have been very hard to nurture and reassure him with words. But, what better way to nurture a child such as Robert to show him you still care than to feed him? It was such a brilliant use of "money in the bank" I overcame my nagging feeling that maybe I should have been the one to get those hamburgers and not Miss Rose! I didn't do any more restraints in my career as my relationship-building skills grew after that period. However, after any crisis where a child was angry or verbally aggressive towards me I made sure to take him or her out afterwards to shoot baskets, sit down and eat together, or give other "I want to be with you" messages to put that money in the bank.

Love the Unlovable

I have always felt positively about the Reclaiming Youth concept of the importance of "loving the unlovable". Of course Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (1992) were not implying there are kids who are literally unlovable, but rather stressing the importance of reaching out to and accepting the most difficult and challenging kids to be around. James Freeman (2014) points out that very often the youth who are the most difficult to connect with need human connections the most. In a recent article in Child and Youth Care-Net I told the story of a girl named Christine who was a student worker in our recreation office. In an upsetting phone call with her mother she ripped my phone out of the wall and threw it across

the room in my direction (Delano, 2105). She was certainly not at her "lovable best" at that moment and stormed out of the office cursing. It was a golden "money in the bank" opportunity at that point. I will never forget the look on her face the next day when I told her she was not fired from her job, she was a very valuable worker, and speaking as her boss, she better get to work quickly! The position of Recreation Director in a residential program for over 140 youth gave multiple opportunities to make significant "money in the bank" deposits. Even when kids are in their most "unlovable" moments making them feel, and actually be, wanted and useful deposits fortunes of money. Perhaps the most memorable example revolved around a girl named Becky. I was new to the recreation position after 5 years as a direct service Child and Youth Care worker in the living units. I was building the program and wanted to make as many connections as possible with kids I did not know yet to engage them in the central recreation program. One afternoon I had some filing and decorating work to be done and called the Guidance Counselor of the on-campus school to ask if there was a student free who could do some work for me. She would be paid (literally) the grand sum of $1 per hour. When he answered I could barely hear him as there was a lot of banging and a girl screaming in the background. I asked to have a girl come down to work and he said "I can't help now, it is wild up here". Undeterred, I said "Who is that in the background screaming"? He told me it was a new girl Becky who was very agitated (obviously) and had created all sorts of mayhem in the school her first few days there. I said "Well, when she is finished screaming send her down to work". He said "Are you crazy?" I said. "Well, I need the work done and it will get her out of your hair today. It is calm and quiet here with no stimulation so maybe it will help her settle in". What a gold mine developed in so many ways! Fifteen minutes later this angry looking girl came in steaming "Who are you and what do you want??" I told her who I was and there was work to be done at $1 per hour. She gave me the strangest look. When she realized I wasn't kidding she got silent and told me she wasn't always this wild but it was so hard for her being at the center. She then told me a key name to address her when she was getting upset because that is what her parents did and it sometimes worked. She agreed to get to work and she ultimately became a valued student worker in my program for three years. She was respected by all for her work and in many ways became the representative face of the recreation department. Of course, she still had "her moments" in the larger program, but not at work. I had to withstand the pressure I received from many about "rewarding her bad behavior" that day. But, it was "money in the bank" that never left her and, by the way, the girl with the momentary "unlovable" behavior became quite easy for both adults and her peers to love for the way she carried herself in that program.

Making the effort to put "money in the bank" with the "unlovable" has the direct

effect of helping that child feel you care, you still like them, and you accept them. Even better is when you reach out to those kids that Freeman suggests are the hardest to connect with every other kid in the program sees that gesture. You are also putting "money in the bank" with them as the belief that you will also be there for them in their rough moments is planted.

"They better want to come to see YOUR ditches"

Basketball great Bill Russell grew up in an awful racially segregated era in Louisiana. He was a very smart youngster, a good student and a terrific athlete. However, opportunities for Black youth in that era were extremely limited. Reflecting on reasons for his unparalleled success and level of excellence in his career he recalls one day his father took him aside and said "William, I don't know what you will be when you grow up. You might be a teacher, you might stock shelves in a supermarket, you could be a professional athlete, perhaps a doctor, or you might end up digging ditches for a living. Now, if you do end up digging ditches son, there better damn well be people coming down here to Louisiana from New York, Chicago, Detroit and all over to see YOUR ditches. You have to have pride and strive for excellence in whatever you do to be a respected person and to respect yourself". A number of years back I was trying to come up with a working definition of Child and Youth Care work for our agency. I came up with this:

We must always respect "science". But, we must remember that while science is important and should serve as a backdrop, working with children is primarily an "art". It is foundationally about healthy adult-child relationships, feeling and reading the moment, sound judgment, and that truly artistic thing called "genuine caring" ... it is about putting "Money in the Bank" with a child.

Whenever I facilitate a training now I let the class know that I hope they leave with a lot of knowledge. However, I say my primary wish is they leave with many more questions than answers: questions that reflect on themselves and their practice, questions that explore new ideas they heard in the training, questions that challenge themselves to look for ways to be even more excellent, etc.

So, I close this article with a few questions for the reader: How would you describe your "art" of working with children? What are the ways you are putting "money in the bank" with children now? What can you do to help those "deposits" grow? Ask yourself what makes you a "$7 for $5 worker"? Most importantly, although Child and Youth Care work is far more impactful to others than digging ditches, why would I, or any Child and Youth Care peers you respect, want to come and see your proverbial "ditches"? That is, why would we want to come to admire YOUR "art of working with children"? It is the pride in our effort and the beauty of our relational art that best puts

that precious "money in the bank" with children…and the opportunity to build relationship connections with children is a precious thing we all should be honored with and savor.

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Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

Of lessons learned and those relearned

Maxwell Smart and John Digney

Life is a long lesson in humility.
J.M Barrie, Scottish Writer and Dramatist

When you are old and gray and full of sleep, and nodding by the fire, take down this book and slowly read, and dream of the soft look your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep.
William Butler Yeats, Irish Poet

The wind reached 60 miles an hour in Scotland last night; yet today the temperature is a balmy 15 degrees in Dublin. Late autumn, early winter, it doesn't quite seem like either, yet the weather, like the theme of our 'Celtic Connection' this month seems rather ambiguous. 'Lessons learned' in Child and Youth Care and lessons still to be learned (and re-learned) are pondered as we introduced our own contradictions.

A Glance Back into the Darkness

For many of us, Child & Youth has its historical foundations in residential care, although more and more contemporary practice is seen to encompass a variety of settings for our work (residential, family or community settings) across the world. Child and Youth care worker practice has a focus on the 'real child' in the 'lifespace'; practices which are interpersonal, inter-subjective, and contextual, however, the journey to contemporised CYC thinking and doing has been rocky. History has not been kind as our profession has evolved and mid way through the second decade of this century, we reconcile a legacy of oppressive and abusive caring that was seen as being acceptable at other times. Whether in residential homes (religious, charitable or State run), substitute family care or the abuses of celebrities or politicians; children and youth suffered and were let down, and the lessons from the past have had to be learned.

The Past Today

In our Celtic Kingdoms, we are amidst a period of introspection, considering a

past where youth encountered care environments and interventions that were less about care and caring and more about domination and exploitation. Domination and exploitation was unfortunately the experience of many but thankfully it was not the experience of all.

As with any profession we need to consider this truth; we do not know it all! Also, we need to recognise that we do not always get it right. If we have our eyes open we can see that lessons are all around us - both from the good and the bad. Mistakes are inevitable but acknowledging this is not about admitting we are stupid ... what would be stupid would be to throw the baby out with the bath water every time something goes wrong!

Domination and exploitation are not hallmarks of caring respectful cultures; these are about power and control, where exclusion and isolation contribute to a 'might is right' mentality based on overpowering the individual and controlling what they do and how they do it.

These cultures, learned from experiences of penal institutions and control regimes based on models of dominating to overcome difficulty, have interfered with the growth of our profession – but have no place in it. Martin Luther notes, 'a person, who is converted by fear, remains unconverted'. For some though, learning this lesson has been difficult and there are still some out there with a ways to go, but of body of knowledge is clear:

- We cannot care by control ,
- We cannot love by dominance,
- We cannot develop self worth with young people without cultures of respect,
- We must promote respect, responsibility and dignity.

In short, care and caring is a partnership with young people and their families.

Of Lessons Learned

We now understand that:

- caring and healing come from relationships and not control
- concentrating on deficits does not remedy emotional damage
- resiliency is innate but has to be nurtured
- when needs are met that emotional growth occurs
- effective interventions result from participating with children where they live their lives.

Our profession has grown to understand that helping and healing intertwined … Child and Youth Care Workers (working with trouble youth) must be competed and confident. They must be professionally skilled. We need to help kids and their families meet their needs for significance and competence, autonomy and altruism and we understand that we must hang in with kids and resist temptations to 'throw in the towel' when the going is tough.

In essence, we are now in a better place to know what works well and also what may not; we should keep telling our-

selves that we must be open to keep learning, especially the lessons of the past.

A Lesson not Forgotten

One of the authors has a recent 'back to reality moment' – this occurring during a conversation with an elderly lady (who was childminding the authors kids), it was a moment which challenged the assumptions of a veteran Child Care worker. This lady was enquiring as to the line of work of the author was in. She was told that it was Child and Youth Care Worker in residential care and this sparked an interest. It transpired that the residential facility the writer worked was part of an organisation that the lady had been brought up in. On hearing this and considering the 'past legacy of our care system', the writer found himself beginning to apologise (for the way 'care' happened in the past) and advised her that 'it's not like that now-a-days'. To the authors astonishment she became a little bother and stated that she hoped that the 'care of today bloody better be like it was in the past'.

She went on to advise that she had had a very positive experience of being cared for and expressed how she felt loved and nurtured growing up in that group home … being in care had been a positive foundation for the rest of her life. She had raised her own family and provided care for a 'litter of youngsters' in both day-care and substitute family care. As a child she had a small group of carers whom she loved and had felt loved by. The relationships with her carers bore all the characteristics of contemporary Child and Youth Care thinking and practicing, yet her experiences were located in the mid 1950's!

Docs, What Year are we in?

Modern methods of care and caring located in the past, felt like we had gone 'Back to the Future'. We may not have the "hover-boards" predicted in the movie with Michael J Fox, but the future had already been there directly in front of us all the time; had we been willing to see and hear about it. If the Child and Youth Caring profession is to grow and become strengthened, we must be open to the lessons of the past; we must recognise that in our midst were both negative and positive legacies.

There is no doubt that abusive regimes have existed, regimes which left youngsters traumatised or re-traumatised by their experience of care. None can deny that redressing the past is clearly necessary to help heal the wounds of the past, but baby and the bath water should be destined for different locations, not all past care has been abusive and detrimental.

Harry Vorrath noted back in 1985 that successful care systems demand greatness not obedience and as we consider this we thank the day-carer child minder (referred to in the article) for reminding us how 'great' that greatness can be WHEN we get it right.

Maxie & Digs

Canada's Truth & Reconciliation Commission: A CYC Call to Action

Deborah Megens

A momentous event in Canadian history took place in May 2015 with the release of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) final report. After 6 years of gathering facts, evidence, survivors' statements, and relevant historical documents (albeit not without lengthy court battles to obtain vehemently withheld government documentation), Canada's TCR has concluded their process of investigating and documenting the truth about Residential Schools and their ongoing destructive impact on our nation's indigenous peoples. What I refer to as Canada's "dirty little secret" has been exposed, and the real truth has been told from the lived experiences of the survivors.

The cultural genocide practices and assimilation policies of the Canadian government's Residential School system have resulted in a legacy of intergeneration trauma for our First Nation, Metis, and Inuit peoples. The federal government stripped aboriginal parents of their parental rights, forcibly removed their children, placed them in institutions run by several churches with specific assimilation tactics that included forced Christianization, demonizing of traditional religion, beliefs, language, cultural practices, their loving families and communities, and subjecting them to significant neglect and horrendous abuse. The residential school experience has had a significant, long-lasting negative impact on the social and emotional well-being of indigenous families and communities in Canada, resulting in a plethora of social problems – to name just a few – high rates of domestic violence, substance abuse, family dysfunction, violent deaths, and suicide. The process of healing and reconciliation must now begin to create a better future for children, adolescents, and

families; this IS the calling and the work of the Child and Youth Care (CYC) profession.

Although this is seemingly a Canadian issue, it is solidly embedded in the broader context of global European colonization of indigenous peoples, so it will be relevant to all of our international readers. In fact, the TRC has recommended that the framework for Canadian reconciliation be consistent with the principles set out in Article 43 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2008) which calls for a set of "minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world" (p. 14). This is a globally-relevant event that the world can learn from in acknowledging and addressing injustices to indigenous people everywhere.

Reading the TCR report, it is immediately obvious that there is a clear call to action for CYC professionals, as it eloquently embraces the language of the CYC profession. It respectfully and accurately acknowledges the injustices of the past and seeks to craft new solutions based on intercultural competency and collaboration between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians. The language and concepts articulated in the TCR report, such as self-determination, equity, inclusion, resilience, empathy, reflection, mindfulness, youth engagement, exploring meanings, creating space, respectful dialogue, healing relationships, and shared responsibility all resonate as a direct message to CYC professionals. They are speaking our language, so we need to listen, understand, and respond. Given that the fastest growing population in Canada is aboriginal, with almost half (48%) of them being youth under the age 24 (Statistics Canada, 2013), this is our work, our calling, our profession, our responsibility and, most importantly, our opportunity to take a leadership role in this historic development in Canadian history. I believe that no profession is better positioned to respond

to this calling than CYC practitioners, educators, and scholars.

The TRC report contains 94 Calls to Action, many of which speak directly to the sectors we work in, such as child welfare, education, mental health, youth justice, and community services/programs. In addition to the important work of the TRC, the Office of the Provincial Advocate in Ontario has long been advocating for the needs and rights of aboriginal youth, including organizing and hosting the Feathers of Hope Forums to engage and empower to this disenfranchised group. The resulting report, *Together we are Feathers of Hope - A First Nations Youth Action Plan* (Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, n.d.), mirrors many of the same issues and recommendations for action as the TRC report. The message is loud and clear; much important and exciting work lies ahead for CYC professionals.

As a non-aboriginal person, ally and CYC educator, I have incorporated a learning module on the legacy of Residential Schools for first year CYC college students. I am repeatedly astounded by how little is known about the history of our indigenous peoples; it simply has not been included ... until now; thanks to the work of the TRC – Canada's history is being more accurately represented. In the wise words of the TRC report, reconciliation must start with "ongoing public education and dialogue" (p. 238). I suggest that the first call to action for Canadian CYC professionals is to ensure that we all *relearn* this important national history – the TRC and Feathers of Hope reports are great places to start – and begin a serious dialogue on our profession's role in the collective responsibility for healing the harms of our past and creating a better world for aboriginal youth. I look forward to the conversation, advocacy, and action.

Meegwetch (thank you in Ojibway)

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Bridging Experiences

Laura Steckley

Danny was what we often refer to in Scotland as a cheeky wee chappy. He was a personable young man with a cocky grin and a winning sense of humour. But Danny couldn't tolerate losing. He loved to play football and was pretty skilful at it. Our residential boys' school was part of a football league comprised of other schools that catered to other young people with 'emotional and behavioural difficulties'. There were regular training/practice sessions, and weekly games/matches against the other schools. Danny lived for match day, and he wasn't the only one. More often than not, however, game day held far more disappointment than joy for him.

Football was an excellent medium for the boys to learn how to work together, and to manage aggression, conflict and competition. Of course, more than one of them sometimes struggled with this learning. For Danny, it was somehow different. He would lose his temper over what we perceived to be minor things, and when he lost it, he went nuclear. His reactions were more extreme and for a greater duration than any of the other boys, and there was definitely more fallout.

I've written elsewhere about the school football team and the small piece of research I did on it , and while this column is relevant to all that, it is more so about Danny and is, I guess, my attempt to revisit and make further sense of what went wrong.

Because the league was organised for kids who had difficulties managing their emotions and behaviours, supports were woven into the structure. These supports included an adult playing defence on each team, and a hockey-style sin-bin so that when the boys violated rules of play or conduct, they could be sent off for very short spells of time rather than being yellow- or red- carded.

Once Danny's hair-trigger temper was released, it was a bit like witnessing the Incredible Hulk. He would become enraged and his self-control seemed to disappear. The disproportionality between the perceived trigger, Danny's apparent pain and his level of destructiveness (physical and relational) was beyond anything we had encountered before. Unlike the Hulk, though, Danny stayed his own size, which was significantly smaller than the other boys his age. We had some tacit sense that this probably had something to do with his eruptions, but I can't say we had much more clarity than that.

Because of the frequency and severity of his outbursts, Danny would be banned from training and matches, and sometimes even from more casual play. Once calm, he

would commit to changing his ways. It might also be useful to add, here, that Danny did not lose his temper in this way at other times or in other settings (that we were aware of, anyway).

Each ban grew longer based on the misperception that the shorter duration of the previous one was the cause of its ineffectiveness. Staff would have lots of conversations with Danny, both post-apocalypse and pre-re-joining the team. These had an exploratory, insight-oriented dimension and a problem-solving, strategic dimension, the latter of which involved plans for how he was going to handle things differently.

And sometimes he would handle things differently, for a little while, before the Hulk reasserted himself and it all went awry. I should include that I observed much of this from a distance. I was friendly with Danny, but he resided in a different unit and we didn't ever spend much time together. I witnessed a few of his episodes and heard about many more. I was also the very temporary target of one, simply by being present. So there may be other important details that I am not including here.

Danny never managed to overcome his eruptions on the football pitch and the final solution was a permanent ban – imposed by Danny on himself. I think it was just too painful for him to keep on trying, or maybe to continue to be invested in the football at all.

So where did we go wrong? I still don't know exactly. There were times it definitely wasn't safe to send Danny out on that pitch, and so while I'm not a fan of a consequences-based approach to kids, I do think we should have held him back from playing sometimes. How that was implemented may be up for scrutiny, but since I was less directly involved in that, I can't say much about it.

The desire to explore with Danny what it was all about, and to co-construct strategies to respond differently also makes good sense. Danny seemed to be developmentally capable of this kind of work.

With the benefit of hindsight and subsequent experience and learning, I think we underestimated the pain of that shame that Danny felt at losing; losing here could mean losing the ball to an opponent, being sent to the sin bin for two minutes, or even just not having the ball passed to him during a drive on goal. I don't know if Danny had pervasive shame such that he had to put all of his energies into defending against any sense of regret or remorse about what he'd done (as I've said, I didn't work closely enough with him to have a sense of this). What I do suspect is that he experienced periodic, intolerable shame in relation to 'losing'. Beginning to tap into some meaning making around that might have been useful.

An understanding of the impact of that shame on Danny might have informed the arrangement of bridging experiences. Phelan's work on experience arranging is very useful in this regard, and I wished we'd known about it at the time. Phelan's central argument is that the thoughtful use of activities enables children and young people to experience themselves more

positively – he calls it the 'experience gap'. It is through the cumulative effect of such experiences that they recover and regain developmental ground (rather than from some pivotal, Goodwill Hunting moment of therapeutic insight – I'm extrapolating a bit here, and I'd strongly encourage you to read the article). Experience, not just talking, is the powerful force of change.

There are a lot of necessary ingredients for young people to be able to access this experience gap, but one in particular stands out for me when I think about Danny. Phelan highlights the importance of a fit between how the young person sees himself and the level of the challenge. By simply throwing Danny back into training sessions and matches with a few strategies and renewed commitment, we were setting him up to fail. The level of challenge was far too great.

This is why I referred to the arrangement of not just 'experiences' but of 'bridging experiences'. I first came across this term in Anglin's work where he describes residential child care environments as providing experiences which enable children and young people to, over time, engage in more 'normative environments' – family, community, educational or work environments which they previously could not manage. For many of the boys, the above-mentioned structures of support built into the football were enough scaffolding for them, and so their experiences were very likely to be bridging. They clearly were not for Danny.

Phelan argues that competitive, win/lose activities are unhelpful, stating '[p]eople who have a hopeless or self-defeating story about themselves will not benefit by competition, particularly intensive or emotionally-charged competition' . This just jumps off the page at me. I don't know whether those working more closely with Danny had a sense of his personal narrative, but I do know that the football was clearly intensive and emotionally charged – for him and most of the others. We did seem to have a sense that it was all too much for him, but I don't think we were thinking about how to provide bridging experiences that gave him more solid respite from his demons and helped him develop a sense of self that could handle losing the ball to an opponent.

Figuring out how to do that would have still been a challenge, but at least we would have been addressing some of the source of his difficulty, and not just though words.

Anyway, until next time…

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Creating Welcoming Experiences in Moments of Transition

James Freeman

Child and youth are practitioners who are working alongside young people in moments of transition can reduce the trauma and harm of multiple transitions. This article presents two examples of an initial act of welcoming a young person into a residential care program and provides questions for individual or group reflection.

Keywords:
Relational care, residential centers, foster care, transitions, welcoming environments

Last night I was hanging out with the child and youth care practitioners in our shelter and residential care program. In the course of the evening a young girl arrived by ambulance from the local psychiatric hospital. Another was planning to wake at 3:00am for a flight home to visit their family and plans were being made to welcome another young person who would be arriving the in morning. Transitions were being made not just between the activities of the day and toward bedtime, but between living spaces, programs, environments and relationships.

Creating a welcoming experience is important in these transitions because a young person who is

> *... in the midst of a difficult life situation often feels excluded, devalued, and not worthy of the love of others. Creating welcoming places is a vital step in being sure that [young people] experience the feeling of belonging, worthiness, and inclusion.* (Anderson, 2010)

Moments of transition can make a person feel vulnerable. They are opportunities for caring and to give a young person an

experience that is different from what they have experienced in the past. Child and youth are practitioners who are working alongside young people in moments of transition can reduce the trauma and harm of multiple transitions.

Just take the day off

Recently I was in a gathering of child and youth care practitioners in Austin, Texas where my friend and colleague Steve Bewsey was a part of the group. Steve has put a lot of thought into making an environment positive and welcoming during his career. When a young person enters the emergency shelter where he was director of housing and homelessness, the child and youth care practitioners ask, "What can we do for you?" because, in his words, the exchange is about "forming a relationship based on what they want, not what we want" (Family and Youth Services Bureau, n.d.). In our discussion we talked about the challenges our systems create for young people (whether intentional or not) and the resiliency they demonstrate in overcoming them. Steve mentioned something about giving a young boy the week off after transitioning from another program into the shelter where he worked. It got us thinking about the ways we transition young people in and out of our programs and the ways we might (or might not) be intentional in creating a welcoming experience for them.

Consider the following two examples of the moment a young person enters a new residential program. In real time these examples would unfold as a conversation and are condensed here for reflection. As you read, compare and contrast them in your thinking.

Placement Experience A: River Valley Residential Care Center

At the River Valey Residential Care Center, Rebecca enters a door marked "intake and discharge" and sits on a folding chair. It looks like something familiar from her doctor's office and although she's not sure exactly why it makes her feel a bit nervous. She sits upright waiting for someone to look her way. The intake coordinator walks over and, looking down at a file folder, asks:

> *Are you Rebecca, the kid from the Mountain View program? Well, this looks*

like it's going to be your eighth placement. What brought you into care anyway? I mean what did you do? Well, you don't have to tell me everything, we've got your file in the office. Wow, actually I'm thinking it's probably one of the biggest ones. Kids from Mountain View always are. Anyway, rules of the house are posted right here on the wall. Get to know them because there are consequences for breaking them. You also have rights. I need you to sign this page right here to show you understand them. It's just a requirement from the regional ombudsman. And here's the grievance procedure. Sign it, too. Right here, please. It's just we have to have proof for the paperwork. Everything has to be just right in the file. You probably know you're going to be on "obs" for a week or two. We have to see if you have any behaviors that need to be addressed. If you can keep yourself safe, you know. Let's hurry up because your clinician is coming and you're going to meet your treatment team. We'll that's about it unless I'm forgetting something. Let me show you where your room is. I hope you think it's comfortable. It still has the bed cover from the last kid. She didn't stay long enough to use it much. Pay attention to where we're going because you can't get around without a staff with keys accompanying you. Grab your things and follow me.

Placement Experience B: River View Residential Care Center

At the River View Residential Care Center, Rebecca enters the door marked "reception" and sits on the couch. It looks like something familiar from the coffee shop she used to visit with her aunt. She's not exactly sure why, but she feels like this might be a turning point for her. The reception coordinator enters the room with a warm smile.

Hi, my name is Ana. What's yours? It is a pleasure to meet you. I am really glad you're here. So, wow, you've just moved? That makes a rough day for anyone. Why don't you just take the rest of the day off? There's not much for you to have to do other than get familiar and comfortable with things. Daniel - she's our property manager - she'll be looking for you after lunch. She'll be asking what color you might like your room painted and talk about what furniture you might like in your room. [Pause.] There are a couple of things you might want to know. We usually cook and eat our meals together. The things you like - well we'll be waiting to hear what your favorite things are. Sometimes we eat out on the porch if the weather is nice. [Pause.] Here's your key for the front door and another for where you can store things. [Pause.] There's no rules, really. We do have traditions. You'll learn them from the others. The most important is that we always try to respect one another. [Pause.] I'm glad you're here - did I

already say that? Of course everyone will be wanting to get to know you. But you're in charge of when and how you share any of your story. What other questions do you have for me?

Questions for reflection and action

These two examples both reflect conversations I have heard in visiting various programs around the world. Perhaps there is familiarity in one or both of them with experiences you have had.

What do you notice as differences between the two experiences? What elements make one example more welcoming than the other? How does tone of voice matter and where do you notice it might especially make a difference? Why are pauses in our communication important? What aspects might be particularly helpful to the young person?

There is much to creating welcoming environment than the first moment someone enters a care program. The group will need to be intentional about bringing the young person into the living and recreation space as well as into the existing roles and relationships. There are stories to be shared, meals and experiences to be enjoyed. And, of course, the young person will need to earn their place as they are welcomed into the group.

Our intentionality in language, tone, and action contributes to making transitional moments a positive experience and, perhaps, open opportunities for a new and positive future.

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"A transition period is a period between two transition periods."

George Stigler

I Think We've All Learned Something Here

Nils Ling

The second hand on the IBM clock doesn't slide quietly around the face; each moment is measured off in a violent lurch. And right now it is lurching relentlessly towards show time.

I am backstage, listening to the theatre fill for the second of two sold out shows. I love that sound; the murmur of anticipation, the restlessness. It adds to my own energy, fuels my excitement, allows me to come out strong at the beginning of the show; from there, the audience response carries me through.

And they will respond; this I know. I have done my one-man show "The Truth About Daughters" almost 1,200 times around the world. I have performed in front of audiences of 10 and audiences of over 1,000. I know every syllable, every beat of the two hour show. I know where they will laugh and where they will go silent. I know when I can whisper, confident every member of the audience will lean forward. I know when I will have to pause for a delayed laugh, when I will have to stop and wait for the audience to catch up, when I will have to slow and let the audience's emotions clear. Once I step onstage, there are no surprises for me any more. Not from the audience, anyway. I know where they are at all times because I've learned how to put them there.

For now, there's a buzz on the other side of the curtain as the audience enters. I listen for a while, but it's a half hour before show time and I need to centre myself. I don't need to focus on my lines; I can recite them perfectly no matter what's going on around me, so ingrained are they. More importantly, I need to slow my heart rate, calm myself, put this show in perspective. I can't give it more weight than all the other shows I've done.

But in fact ... it's pretty important to me.

I'm relieved I don't have to worry about the music. In most shows, the music cues are on a CD that is played from the sound booth. That's one more person who can mess up their job. Lights, I can live with. I tell every lighting person, "It's very simple. If you can hear me, make sure you can see me." There are nuances built into the lighting cues, and most lighting techs understand and can work from the scripts they are given a few hours before the show. But if they don't, if the worst hap-

pens, if the cues just confuse them or they doze off or get lost and they don't know what to do, I say, "If you can hear me, make sure you can see me."

The music cues that are played between scenes of the show are trickier, but I don't have to think about those because my daughter Erin is touring with me this time. She's in her 20s, a classically trained pianist. She knows the show word for word, she knows when to play and when to be silent, and her presence calms me.

We're in the "Green Room". Every theatre has a "Green Room". They are rarely green. Sometimes, they aren't even a room. In my touring life, I have been in "Green Rooms" that – during the day – serve as chemistry labs; libraries; hockey dressing rooms; trailers; storage closets; and hotel rooms. Some have been cramped and decrepit. Other have been downright palatial.

This one is somewhere in between. Most days, it serves as an office/storage area for the 150 seat high school theatre. There's a desk piled high with papers, a couple of plastic backed chairs, and a donated second hand couch. There's a mirror on the wall, and a sink – and, of course, that clock. But that's about it.

Erin can sense I am jittery. "Relax," she says. "Think of it as just one more show."

I can't. Not this show.

***

"Relax," my mom says. "Think of it as just another word. Sound it out."

My brother Jay tries: "G-g-g ... i-i-i ... f-f-f ...". He stops, stymied.

"Gift," I say. I think I'm being helpful. I don't understand how he can't read it. It's so plain to me. And he's my big brother. He's in Grade Three. I'm only just preparing for Kindergarten.

Every day, Mom sits with Jay on the couch, trying everything she can think of to help him read. Jay has dyslexia. Reading will always be a challenge for him, but Mom won't accept that he can't learn. She knows he's smart. So she sits patiently for an hour a day, taking him through book after book, urging him to sound out the words, rewarding him with hugs and smiles and compliments when he gets it right.

I want in on that. I love hugs and smiles and compliments from my mom. They can be in short supply in a family with six kids. Mom does her best to make us all feel special, but Dad's away a lot, and six kids means six breakfasts, six lunches, six suppers, six baths, cleaning, laundry – a daily routine that would exhaust a weaker woman. She makes most of our clothes. She bakes, she has a one acre garden she plants and tends and harvests, and she makes preserves from the bounty. She is Supermom.

But even Supermom has to budget her hugging time.

(The next year, 1960, when I am 6 years old, she will be named Chatelaine Magazine's Housewife of the Year. Nowadays the title "Housewife" seems curious and archaic and patronizing. But in 1961, it wasn't a bad word. And take my word on this: being named Housewife of the Year

by Canada's leading women's magazine was a huge deal in 1960. She was actually identified as a Supermom, although not in those words.)

So every night, I perch on the arm of the sofa while my brother sits beside her, being drilled on phonics. Looking over her shoulder, I can see the words she's asking him to read, and they make perfect sense to me. Sometimes I can't resist barking out the answer impatiently. This earns me dark glares from Jay and a nudge from Mom.

"Don't help," she says gently, and turns back to Jay.

Eventually, I got bored by these simple exercises. I began to read books that were lying around the house. I grabbed anything I could find – storybooks, texts, encyclopaedias, anything with words. I became addicted to reading, and when I ran across a word I didn't know, I couldn't just skim over it.

"What does this word mean?" I would ask my Dad. He would fold his paper down and chuckle at me.

"Look it up," he would say, and point to the Oxford International Dictionary of the English Language (Unabridged).

I still have that very dictionary. When Dad passed a few years ago, my sisters thought I should have it, because they could all remember how much time I would spend with it. I was that kid who would actually read the dictionary for fun. I couldn't lift it when I was that young – it weighs close to thirty pounds and is the size of a toaster oven – but it sat on a low end table and I could stand over it and page through it for hours. Which I did.

And of course, I got better and better at reading. Good enough at reading to set off a chain of events that resonated through every part of my life for decades later and still resonates today.

You've heard of "Too smart for your own good."?

Hi. I'm Nils.

***

In the half hour before a show, I need to take time to think through every scene and remind myself of the simple truth I am trying to express in each moment. If I know the truth, I can't make a bad acting choice. My Mom used to say, "If you tell the truth, you'll have far less to remember." She wasn't talking about being an actor onstage, but that same wisdom applies. If a script is well written and honest, actors who understand their characters have little trouble remembering their lines. They simply tell the truth as their character sees it. The line should be spot on.

I have the added advantage of having written the play; I'm the only one who knows what is a right line and where I've screwed up. That can make you lazy, so I've gotten in the habit of reminding myself of the one truth in each scene. It keeps me sharp, and it distracts me in the half hour before curtain. Both good things.

Because right now, I am having trouble focusing. It's the damn clock, I decide. TICK. TICK. TICK. The red second hand lunges to its next position, then sits and quivers there, waiting for its next order. TICK. TICK. TICK.

I go out into the hallway across from the school gym, and pace in front of the drink machines. I absently note that they are stocked with juices and water for $1.50 apiece.

We never had drink machines when I was in school. We had water fountains that you leaned over to sip from, every muscle tensed in case somebody – in my case, most of the male population of the school – decided it was a perfect time to smack the back of your head. Two chipped front teeth taught me to drink from water fountains the same way antelopes on the Serengeti drink from watering holes. It's a jittery, nervous life when you're easy prey.

***

They pulled me out of Kindergarten right after nap time and took me to the Principal's office. Mom and Dad were there. I didn't follow a lot of what they were saying, but one word kept surfacing: "accelerated". I got home and looked it up. That didn't help. I couldn't figure out why they wanted me to go faster. I thought I was already pretty fast.

The next week, in the middle of a January cold snap, Mom took me off the Air Force base and into town. We ended up in a doctor's office, but not the kind with rubber hammers in the drawer and a high bed with paper that sticks to your arse. This had dark paneling and soft chairs. I was given tests to take and pages to read aloud and was asked questions about the stories. It took most of the afternoon.

A few days later I got to miss school again. Same doctor, same office, except now Mom and Dad were both there. Mom kept smiling at me, reassuring me that I wasn't in any kind of trouble. Things would be just fine.

If Mom said things would be just fine, things would be just fine.

I sat on a couch and read a book while the adults talked. I caught a few snatches of the conversation:

"So, here's the number that denotes a "Genius". You see it's 144. Here it that number on what we call a Bell Curve. Now, here's your son's IQ on the same curve ...".

"He can't stay where he is in school. He'll be bored to tears. He's reading at a level you just don't see till junior high school. We think. We don't know for sure. He's off any chart we have for his age ...".

"This can't happen unless you agree. And unless he wants to. But we think it's the best strategy ...".

At this point, everyone in the room turned to me. I looked up from my book.

"Do you want to go into a higher grade?" Mom asked.

"I guess," I said.

"Do you like the books you're reading in Kindergarten?"

"There are no good books there. Can I bring some from home?" They looked at one another.

And the next day, I was introduced as the new kid in Grade Two.

I was almost – almost - six years old.

Yikes.

***

Twenty minutes to show time. In the hallway, I run into a former teacher. He smiles and tells me how much he's looking forward to the show. Obviously, he hasn't read the program yet.

***

At recess, I wanted to go play with my friends, but their recess was at a different time. So I sort of hung around the swings by myself until a group of kids came by. One of the bigger boys, a kid named Jimmy Gillette, shoved me down into the snow. He leaned over and scooped up some snow and rubbed it into my face - "washing your face", they called it – then they all wandered off, laughing.

I got home from school at lunchtime and Mom asked me how my first morning went. I started to cry. I didn't want to go back. "The big kids were mean to me. Jimmy Gillette washed my face."

But I had to go back, and as I walked through the playground I saw a crowd of kids circled around. I pushed my way through. I could see my brother Jay, straddling a kid, pounding on him.

Jimmy Gillette.

I never got my face washed after that incident. That night, we had a rare treat for supper: dessert. Jay's favourite – apple crumble. I'm sure it was just a coincidence. Otherwise, it would kind of be a contract hit.

Even without getting pushed around, I never had much fun at recess. Classes were okay, although I still didn't enjoy the books. For reading material, the teacher let me go to the Grade Four room and pick through their meagre fare. There wasn't much challenge in those books, either. I'd have rather brought books from home. I had started reading my oldest sister's high school texts.

I loved reading her Latin lessons. "Ubi est Brittania?" ("Where is England?") (It never occurred to me to wonder in what possible context that question might come up. You wouldn't think you'd set off with a conquering army without knowing the general direction you were headed. What, did Julius Caesar arrive in France and hail down some peasant, get him to draw directions in the dirt with his foot?)

Another sister had started buying me books in the Dave Dawson series. Dave Dawson was a young boy who lied about his age to become a pilot in the R.A.F. He spent a lot of time shooting down Germans in their Messerschmitts. He flew the same planes my Dad had instructed on during the war. I was captivated by this young boy, who fit in perfectly with older comrades because of his achievements. Go figure.

I didn't much fit in. I wasn't getting picked on – Jay's drubbing of Jimmy Gillette had put paid to that. But who in Grade Three wants to play with a kid who should be in Kindergarten?

I'm sure it broke my mom's heart. I'd come home and she'd hug me, and when I talked about being lonely she'd smile and wipe away my tears and tell me things would be just fine.

And when Mom said things would be just fine, things would be just fine.

***

"Time," says Erin. She slips out onto the stage in the black and takes her place behind the piano. I wait for the music to begin, the opening theme for the show.

When she begins playing, I take a deep breath. I remind myself how much audiences love the show and that these people are just like any other audience. I walk onto the stage and, as the music stops, the lights come up.

And they applaud. Loud, prolonged applause.

Well. This is ... different.

***

Air Force families bounce around from base to base every few years. Sometimes you have friends whose father gets transferred at the same time to the same place. Other times you sink or swim in a brand new pool of sharks.

With each new school, I would have to find new friends. It was agreed that nobody in the family would mention my birthday. My mom would meet with the new teachers and explain the situation. I became just a "smaller kid" to my classmates. I was in their grade, so they assumed I was the same age as they were.

I didn't go out for sports much. When I did, I had to show my birth certificate. Being a February baby, I could use that as the reason I ended up an age group below my classmates in hockey. Nobody was ever curious enough to do the math.

In school, I kicked all kinds of ass. So, things were going along fine.

Then Jay went off to Junior High.

I was fair game. I was little and skinny and smart and wore glasses and didn't play sports well and got answers that the bigger kids were stumped on and the teachers loved me and I won scholastic awards and spelling bees and oh, dear Lord, could you put a bigger target on a kid's back?

I knew I had to do something. So I found the biggest kid in class and became his friend. I told him jokes. I made him laugh till milk sprayed out his nose. I learned that being funny bought me acceptance. I began performing in class. At recess. On the walks to and from school. I was "the funny kid". Nobody picks on the funny kid.

Being funny came naturally to me because both my mom and dad were hilarious. They valued laughter. Dad was an unmerciful tease, and we were expected to be able to laugh at ourselves. Our suppers, with eight people crowded around the table, were uproariously funny. The rule was (and still is) that once the conversation got too raucous, you could only speak if you had the salt shaker in your hand. "I have the salt shaker!" was the signal for everyone to shut up and listen to the joke.

And it better be a good one. That was one tough crowd. Over the years I have never played to an audience so cheerfully willing to slice and dice you for a bad joke. I have never feared hecklers. I grew up with the meanest hecklers on the planet.

Being funny served me well. I was still the little guy, but now I had a gang.

Except being funny is all about "What have you done for me lately?" Better keep 'em laughing.

***

Act One is going smoothly. The audience has bought into the premise. They're with me, only too ready to follow where I lead them.

"The Truth About Daughters" takes the audience through 25 years in a relationship between a father and his little girl. It's a series of stories – vignettes of their life together - told through letters he tapes to her (remember tapes? Tape recorders?), as time rolls along. Most of the stories are funny, but a few have a tinge of tenderness and a couple are downright heartbreaking. I tried to paint from the whole palette of human emotions in writing the show, and people tell me it comes through.

I first wrote the show to play in repertory with a musical I had written called "Maritime Star". The brand spanking new 500 seat Harbourfront Jubilee Theatre in Summerside, Prince Edward Island, was presenting Maritime Star to rave reviews. They wanted a show seven nights of the week, but the cast needed a break. So I stepped up with the idea of this one man show about a man and his daughter.

(I say I stepped up, but it was sort of an accident.)

I had been in Toronto, visiting friends. While there, I went out to the theatre to see a couple of shows. One was "Wingfield Follies", part of a series of wonderful one man shows created by a couple of brothers, Rod and Doug Beattie.

When I got home, a friend of mine called. Walter Learning is a well-known figure in Canadian theatre – an artistic director, producer, actor, director, writer – he has done it all. He asked me how I enjoyed Toronto. Did I see any shows?

"Well, yes ... I saw the latest Wingfield show," I said.

"And how did you like it?" asked Walter. He heard me pause. "No, wait. I'll tell you how you liked it. You thought it was good but you said to yourself, "I can do this." Right?"

I said, "Exactly right. I can."

"You know the difference?" Walt asked.

"What?"

"He fucking DID it."

Fair enough. So the stage was set for me to accidentally write a show that would change my life.

It happened in a conference call with the theatre's Board of Directors. They told me they were looking for a second show.

Did I have any ideas for a small show, maybe a one man show?

The previous weekend, I'd been doing standup comedy on a CBC radio program and I had come up with this short scene about a father holding his infant daughter and explaining the circumstances of her birth. It was very funny – the audience loved it – and it flashed into my mind when I was asked if I had any ideas.

"Yes, I do," I said. "It's a one man show called ... " I paused, then just blurted out, ""The Truth About Daughters."" I do not know how the title came to me. But there it was. This show had a title.

"Can you give us an idea of what it's about?"

"Oh ... uh .. sure ..." So I performed that comedy piece, just as I'd written it for the radio show. On the other end of the conference call, they were breaking up laughing. I finished the scene and said, "And the rest of the show goes from there..." *(Please, God, let them not have questions ...)*

Because of course there was no "rest of the show". There was nothing. They had heard everything I had. But ... they didn't know that. And it seemed cruel to tell them.

There was a pause. At the other end I heard, "Everybody agree?" General assent. And that was it. I was commissioned to perform a show that hadn't been written or even outlined. I had been funny, and because I had made them laugh, they gave me three months to create a play that would run two nights a week and that I would develop into a touring show and travel with – across Canada and around the world – for the next decade.

Being funny rocks.

Usually.

***

In Grade Seven, my classmates began having parties on Friday nights. They were tame affairs. Nothing more intoxicating than 7Up or Coke, although Jimmy Coates once brought some Aspirin to a party. Apparently, if you mixed it with Coke you got drunk or something. A few of us tried it. Didn't feel like much to me, but one of the girls (yes, I remember her name and no, I won't tell you - she was in Grade Six, for God's sake) (Debbie Salo) started slurring her words and staggering. She started kissing all the boys. Well, all but one. She missed me. Which was fine. Kissing girls was gross. Personally, I think she was faking the whole thing.

We needed someone to play the music at the party, so we could all dance. Oh, did I say "we"? I meant "they" needed someone to play music. I became the de facto disc jockey. None of the girls wanted to dance with me (let alone do anything else), and there wasn't enough Aspirin and Coke in the world to change that. So I would stay in the corner with the record player and a stack of 45s (kids, go ask your parents) and play the soundtrack for the night.

It was my first experience in sensing and manipulating the mood of the audience. I could tell when they were feeling playful and upbeat, and I'd put on fast

dance tunes. During the inevitable game of Spin the Bottle, I'd move to something with a medium pace. But as the night went on, the tunes would get slower and slower, and couples started wandering into dark corners. Often I'd feel like quitting and going home, but then there would be no sound coming from the rec room, and no sound was what the parents upstairs heard the best. So I'd take yet another one for the team.

I can't blame the girls for not being interested. I was 9 years old. They were 11. I was the age of their annoying kid brothers. Even if they didn't know our age difference, they could feel the maturity gap. I was a little kid. A funny little kid. But still. There would be no Spin the Bottle if I was in the circle. (Honestly? I can't say I cared all that much about not kissing girls. Yuck.)

But what all this meant was I began to develop a view of myself as being fundamentally of no interest to girls. They didn't see me as annoying, usually. They didn't see me as amusing. They just didn't see me. At all.

So I was perfectly prepared for Junior High.

***

In almost every theatre I play, they remind people ahead of time to turn off their cell phones or pagers. It should be common sense, but it isn't. We get so used to having these things available to us that they become almost an extension of our arm. I have heard the reminder announcements hundreds upon hundreds of times. And still, when I go to the theatre as an audience member and they say, "Ladies and Gentlemen, we would ask that you now switch off all cell phones ...", I go "Oh! Right!" and reach into my pocket. So I understand how it can easily slip a person's mind. But still, it's always distracting when one goes off during a show.

One time in a small town in Saskatchewan, a woman in the front row of the show had her phone ring. She fumbled around in her purse, finally pulling it out on the third ring. Then ... she answered it.

No, really. She answered her phone. She began conversing with the person on the other end – not loudly, but still. She was having a phone conversation. In the front row of a play. While the play was going on. I have no idea what form of livestock-related emergency she was dealing with (or descended from), but I think we can all agree that was not cool.

Other times, phones have gone off in mid-show and it hasn't really bothered me a lot. It happens. Find your phone quickly, silence it, look around sheepishly, and we'll all move on.

Tonight, I am in the middle of Scene Four when the phone begins ringing. And ringing. And ringing. I'm in a tender part of the scene, a story about a young girl faltering at a piano recital. I want the audience to feel her mortification, to see her little shoulders shaking as she breaks into tears. But they can't get there, because this fucking phone keeps ringing and ringing and ringing and ringing.

I can't respond. I've seen performers stop concerts and embarrass the cell

phone offenders, and I don't fault them for it. But if I stop now, in mid-scene, I lose the entire atmosphere I have created. I decide to carry on, between rings.

I glance over at Erin, behind her piano. Her face is a thundercloud. Pure anger. She's a classical pianist. She has no tolerance for this sort of nonsense. Her eyes are smouldering. And as I look into them, I realize Erin's anger is directed at me.

Then it sinks in.

Nobody is going to answer that phone. Nobody can. It is backstage. Tucked safely into the pocket of my jacket. Volume turned up to "LOUD". Ringing. And ringing. And ringing. And ringing.

I say "ringing", but really, it's more than that. My ringtone is the first few bars of Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik". Repeating over. And over. And over. And over. And over.

With no other choice, I carry on with the story and finally, mercifully, the ringing stops. But I know I'm going to pay at Intermission.

***

Middle school was a blur for me. All the boys shot up in height in what felt like a single summer; I came back to school in Grade Eight and felt like I was in a redwood forest. If anything, I became physically less impressive by default. I now *literally* couldn't be seen.

But I could be heard, so that's the way I went. I became the entertainer, the class clown, the "disruptive influence". And the beauty of it was, I had some of the highest marks in school, certainly in English and History and anything involving lots of reading. So while the teachers often became exasperated, there wasn't much they could do.

My brother wasn't around to protect me. But the girls were. By Grade Nine, I had been adopted as a sort of mascot by the girls. Any guy who took a run at me was subject to scorn and contempt from all the most popular girls. It was easier by far just to ignore me, so that's what they did.

Oh, I got kicked around a little. But I was hanging with the cool kids, the athletes, the pretty girls. I was a Court Jester, not popular by myself but accepted by association.

I got a guitar and learned how to play – not particularly well, not good enough to be in a band, but certainly well enough to sing comical songs from Allan Sherman and Tom Lehrer and the Smothers Brothers, albums my parents bought me. None of the other kids knew those songs, but funny is funny and I was adding to my arsenal.

Things were going just fine.

Oh. Hello, high school.

***

"Really? A cell phone? You're an idiot."

Erin is laughing at me. We're relaxing in the Green Room at Intermission, and she's toured with me enough to know that this is where I start second-guessing every moment of my performance, finding all sorts of flaws and problems and things I should have done better and lines I missed and

lines I didn't hit hard enough and times I didn't wait long enough for the laughs and times I waited just a moment or two too long and it felt awkward to me and on and on until, if you weren't my daughter and didn't love me, you'd want to strangle me.

So Erin slides easily into her role as Reassurance Officer. When I begin to obsess, she lays her hand gently on my arm. "You're doing great. It's going perfectly. They're loving it. You can hear them laughing. You're killing it. Relax. Drink some water."

I hate when my kid is smarter and more poised than me. When did that happen?

***

The first day of school is always exciting. You see kids you haven't seen all summer, and as you go into a larger, new school you meet new kids, every one a potential best friend or worst enemy, a tormentor or protector, a comrade or an antagonist.

It was always fun to see the changes in old friends wrought by a couple of months of summer vacation. And going into Grade Ten in a new high school was no different. There were changes in lots of my classmates. If I had to sum the most noticeable of those changes up in one word, that word would be:

Breasts.

Seriously. It was like all the girls went to summer Breast Camp. It was astonishing. And intoxicating.

Now, I'll admit that other factors might have been in play. At almost 14 years old, my voice had started to change. I was noticing things that hadn't been on my radar before puberty. And most of the girls had gotten taller, but I hadn't, yet. So, you know, pretty much eye level.

But man, oh, man. I suddenly began to develop an interest in girls.

This was a problem, because the girls in Grade Ten were interested in older boys. More mature. Boys who drove cars. I still rode a bike. And not a cool bike, like a ten-speed racer, or a mountain bike (which would have been something, since they hadn't yet been invented). Nope, mine was a garden variety CCM kid's bike. With a basket. (I know. Chick magnet.)

So realistically, I knew I wasn't going to be a big hit with the ladies. But I didn't like guys much. Almost all the guys at school were big into hockey. I was a bad, bad hockey player. (True story: I once got traded from one hockey team to another. Not for another player. I got traded for a goalie's glove. And it wasn't an actual regulation goalie's glove. It was a first baseman's trapper. To sum up: so awesome were my hockey skills that I was traded for a piece of equipment. From another sport entirely.)

But something happened in the first week of school. One day I brought my lunch, and was sitting in my homeroom with a couple of the cutest girls in class. And we were talking, and I just started telling stories. Funny stories. And they began to laugh.

Next day, the same two girls were there, and each had brought a friend. And again I started spinning out stories and again they were all laughing. It felt wonderful. These gorgeous girls wanted to hang with me, because I made them laugh till they were shrieking.

A week later, I asked one of the girls who had joined us for lunch if she wanted to go to the first school dance with me. She shuffled awkwardly and looked down at her feet, and finally said, "I think I just want to be friends."

That was the story of my life in high school. I had way more girls who just wanted to be my friend than I ever had friends.

The point is not that I wasn't attractive to girls, although I wasn't. And the point is not that I used some sort of natural wit and humour to make girls comfortable enough to be friends with me. The point here is that I was learning that the only thing that stood between me and a hellish, friendless existence was being able to make people laugh.

And of course, I took my show on the road into every classroom I entered. I didn't care about the classes – my scholastic history had taught me I could cut classes or get kicked out with impunity. I was on a mission to entertain.

I think the term "disruptive influence" was invented with someone like me in mind. As I look back on it now, I roll my eyes at the loudmouthed little turd I became. Teachers began to expect the worst out of me and I rarely disappointed. To their credit, most didn't seem to actually hate me. They just didn't want me in their rooms because it made their jobs harder.

I started to take a pack of cards to school and keep it in my back pocket, because I pretty much knew I would end up out in the hall at some point, and I wanted to have something to do. I became very good at solitaire.

Here's the thing: not one of the teachers I had – and some of them were really quite dedicated, committed educators – ever seemed to wonder why I was doing this. I was disruptive. Nowadays, the diagnosis would be a no-brainer. I was (and am) clearly ADHD. But none of my teachers were psychologists. To be fair to the other students, they couldn't let me go on and on while they were trying to teach. So they booted me out.

One day my English teacher said to me, "If you like performing so much, why waste it here? Why not go out for Drama Club? Why not audition for the school musical?"

Hmm. A real stage. Interesting thought ...

***

I'm sailing through the second act, and I am in command. I'm at my very best. I know every beat of the show, and I can feel the audience with me as a single organism. They laugh when I want them to, applaud where I know they will, become subdued or uncomfortable or quiet at my whim. And now comes the pivotal scene in the show.

When I wrote "The Truth About Daughters", I realized I had to be open and honest in telling the stories. Funny, sure. But some stories in a family's life just can't be made funny. And to cut those stories out makes the overall play two dimensional and frivolous. The scene I wrote – based on a true event in my life – was a corker.

When Erin was just a year and a half old, my wife and I went into the hospital to have our second child. After a difficult labour, Kathryn came into this world, and was immediately rushed to Infant Intensive Care. We were taken to a small room to wait for the doctor. When he arrived, he shifted awkwardly before meeting our eyes and giving us news that launched us into Hell.

"Your baby can't survive," he said. "She might last a few hours, but certainly won't live for a full day." He said a lot more, but really, trust me: that's all that registers. He ended with, "I'm very sorry."

My wife looked up at this doctor, still pale from her long labour, her hair bedraggled, her face a mask of excruciating sorrow. She reached out and took his hand. "I feel very sorry for you," she said. "This must be a horrible part of your job. Thank you for being so kind."

I will never, ever be a strong enough person to do something that generous.

I adapted this true story to fit the time lines of the play, and told the story pretty much exactly how it happened. I never had to memorize it. The story came straight from the heart, every word was true, and the delivery was deadpan, wooden, not riddled with "acting moments". But every time I get to that part in the play, the audi-

ence becomes breathless, deathly still. And in that silence you can hear sniffles out in the audience.

When people talk about the "Demise of Live Theatre", they often make reference to other forms of entertainment, like video games and sports, which they call more "interactive". I'd love to have someone explain to me how anything can be more interactive than an entire theatre filled with people of all ages and backgrounds, all going through an identical emotional experience together.

The scene finishes to dead silence. At the end of every other scene in the show, there's been laughter and applause. Nobody knows quite what to do with this one. But that's okay. I know what to do. As the lights dim, Erin begins playing a short piece of classical music, slow and mournful at first but gradually sliding up in pace and tone until the tension is broken and the next scene can begin.

Home stretch.

***

The first time I stepped out onto a stage I felt at home.

I don't remember the play; it was a one act piece about a couple on a date. I had auditioned for the part and won it and, to my delight, discovered the two characters kiss at the end.

To be honest, the kiss is all I really remember. I'm not sure how well I acted. I don't remember a single line. But I do remember I got to kiss a girl named Wendy. Given rehearsals, and dress rehearsal, and performances, I got to kiss her seven times.

Performances were held in the school's theatre. It held 200 people. While we were waiting to go on, we hung around in the office backstage. It was a smallish room. There was a desk piled high with papers, a couple of plastic backed chairs, and a donated second hand couch. There was a mirror on the wall, and a sink – and of course, an IBM clock with a second hand that marked off each moment with a violent lurch. TICK. TICK. TICK.

***

And here I am, almost four decades later, in that same theatre.

The show is one of two that was scheduled around my school's 75th Anniversary and Reunion. I'd been asked to do a couple of shows as a fundraiser for the Scholarship Fund. Of course I agreed. Both shows sold out, many of the tickets snapped up by former classmates and staff. Each show raised about $5,000.

As the play ends, the audience leaps up – a spring-loaded standing ovation. I've had similar responses, but the giant grin on Erin's face as she looks over at me tells me she knows how much this particular ovation means to me.

***

High school wasn't the best time of my life. I was left out of stuff. I was mocked and picked on, although I learned to fight back the only way possible: with words and wit.

After never once having a grade below an A in my entire school career, I failed Grade Ten. I didn't get stupid overnight; I

just found things I wanted to do more than study. I missed classes, got kicked out of others, didn't bother with assignments, assumed I would pass because I'd never had to do a lick of work before in school and had always sailed through.

(Also, for all my brains, I am still baffled by Algebra. It never made sense to me. I took it once, then took it again in summer school, then took it again my second time through Grade Ten, then had to take it one more time in summer school. Finally, I was given a 52. The teacher did it with the solemn understanding that I would never ever again take a math course. Deal.)

If I'm looking back on it honestly, I think I failed because I needed to find a social group that would take me. I like to think of it as "decelerating".

My folks were angry and confused. As a parent now, I get that. I feel badly about what they must have gone through. And my marks never ever did go to the top of the class again. I was fine with that. I got Bs and Cs (unthinkable only a couple of short years before), but I was performing and had friends and in my last year, I even found a girlfriend whom I would marry years later.

I did what I did to survive as best I could. By being a smart-ass, I avoided being beaten up, I won acceptance, I was able to keep company with girls, and was able to make sense of my place in the social world.

When I left high school, I took English and Politics in University, and went into a couple of marketing type jobs. I did fine, but nothing really moved me much. Then Kathryn was born and died and I decided I needed to spend my life making people laugh.

I began doing stand-up comedy and appearing on CBC Radio and Television. I got a name for myself. I wrote books and a syndicated humour column and was offered the opportunity to write a musical. People were laughing. And I was making them laugh. And as it turns out, that's not a bad way to make a living.

***

At the end of the show, I point out to the audience that there's something missing from the program. "Our musician tonight isn't given the proper attention, so I'd like to introduce her now ..."

And, at the end of a show about a father's lifelong, loving relationship with his daughter, I introduce my daughter Erin. That's always good for an audible gasp and more applause. And we stand together, hand in hand, as the applause showers down around us, and, as one, we bow.

There is a dedication page in the program for these shows. I thought long and hard about it, and finally wrote this:

"These shows are lovingly dedicated to all those teachers who sent me out of the classroom to sit in the hall with the words, "Young man, if you think you're going to go through life and people are going to pay you to be a smart-ass ... you've got a big surprise coming."

Well. I think we've all learned something here."

Postcard from

Leon Fulcher

NOVEMBER 2015

Halò and *Ceud mìle fàilte frae* – hello and warm greetings from Scotland where I spent a few days at the beginning of the month visiting family and friends as well as spending time with youth projects in East Lothian, the Kibble Education and Care Centre's Hillington Experience, and a brief visit to CELCIS, the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland in Glasgow. It was a busy but enjoyable time all round! I especially enjoyed spending time with David Drysdale and to hang out with this amazing guy with the spirit of a giant! Thank you Drysdales – all of you!

Welcome to Edinburgh International Airport!

Scotland and football – whether round shaped or rugby – go hand in hand. Sorry to see Scotland go out of the Rugby World Cup by a 1 point loss to Australia! Opportunity to take in a senior school match between two Lothian title contenders was great fun. Lasswade Academy won 9-2 but the most important feature of the match was the teaching and learning prevailing throughout the game.

A Goal Scored by the Lasswade Academy Youth Team

Transferable skills are learned during any sporting activity offering opportunities for important developmental achievements with young people. Check out http://f-marc.com/11plus/home/ to learn about the "FIFA 11+" warm-up programme that helps reduce injuries amongst male and female football players aged 14 years and older – especially ACL and hamstring injuries by 30 to 50%!

As a field, child and youth care workers must never underestimate the learning associated with any planned use of activities

Football involves a whole lot more than winning!

or sport. Team sports such as football (soccer if you are in North America) offer amazing opportunities for learning transferable life skills of use in all social circumstances. Developmental achievements associated with boundaries for daily living, peaceful conflict resolution, service to others, or planning and decision-making are all there to be seen – so long as child and youth care workers are willing to notice learning opportunities in the moments of any activity. I was particularly impressed with the group debriefing at the end of the match, reinforcing learning and acknowledging achievements made by each and every young person throughout the game.

Another highlight of my week was the visit to the Hillington Experience Project established by Kibble Education and Care Centre through its social enterprise initiatives! In addition to a full catering facility available for use by local youth clubs, there is a professional slot-car racing track, the likes of which one rarely finds in most places. But the pride and joy must be the Formula 1 sized Go-Kart track – complete with fly-over – where the cars are serviced and maintained by young people in care with the support of qualified car repair workers also holding youth work qualifications!

Slotcar Racing at the Kibble Hillington Experience Professional Track

Testing the Go-Kart Formula 1 Track at Kibble's Hillington Experience

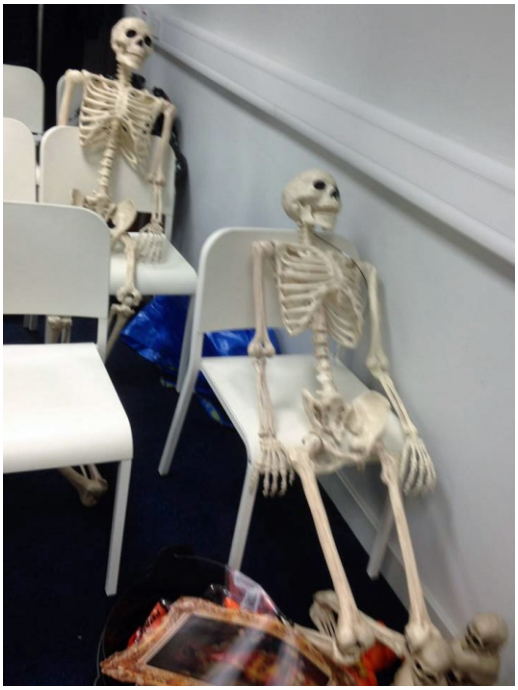
From entering the male or female changing rooms where each prospective driver dons coveralls, kit and driving helmets, pre-car assignment briefings and then assignment to Go-Karts – youths in 'looked after care' are involved in all aspects of the track, including the control booth where lap times and performance are all monitored with print-outs given to each driver at the end of their circuits.

Kibble's Hillington Experience offers Tandem Go-Karts for Disabled Youths

Each battery-operated car is sponsored by local businesses – like big league race cars – and there are also tandem cars for young people with a disability! Just as in the Glasgow Commonwealth Games, disability is translated into capability, and everyone can have a go!

I did find two characters in a back room who looked as though they hadn't much enjoyed their Hillington Experience! But then, as I am writing this on Halloween, I couldn't resist including them!

But there is nothing quite like a visit to The Trossachs and the Scottish Highlands.



Some Hillington Experience Characters who didn't do so well!

There was even a brief visit to The Trossachs near Loch Katrine

It was a brief visit but a wonderful opportunity to re-connect with special people and enlightened youth care practices!

THE INTERNATIONAL CHILD AND YOUTH CARE NETWORK

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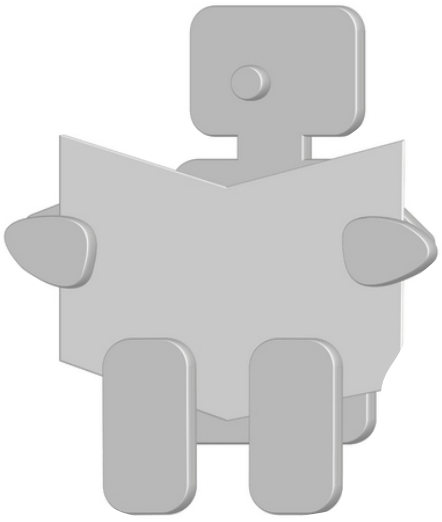

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