

CYC-Online

Online 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 199
September 2015**





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

Issue 199
September 2015



Contents

Editorial: Finding the Right Mix	/ 3
Touch Something, Throw Something	/ 5
<i>Kiaras Gharabaghi</i>	
Beware of the Big Bad Storyteller? An exploration of the therapeutic potential of bedtime reading from the perspective of young people and residential workers	/ 7
<i>Dawn Simpson</i>	
Clinical CYC Practice	/ 20
<i>Jack Phelan</i>	
Changing Scenes in California's System for Youth in Care	/ 22
<i>James Freeman</i>	
The Fear of Non-Doing	/ 28
<i>Paul Paget</i>	
Flotsam or Jetsam: Claiming the wreckage	/ 32
<i>John Digney and Maxwell Smart</i>	
CYC in the 21st Century: A Radical Proposition	/ 37
<i>Hans Skott-Myhre</i>	
Women's Lives – SOS Mothers tell their stories, Part 2	/ 42
Reunion	/ 58
<i>Laura Steckley</i>	
Advocacy Project Take Two: An uncomfortable challenge?	/ 62
<i>Aurora De Monte & Heather Sago</i>	
Postcard from Leon Fulcher	/ 64
Endnotes	/ 68
Information	/ 70

Finding the Right Mix

Sylviane decided to plant a new ‘forest’ beside our house. It involved cleaning out the old shrub brush (wild cherries actually), and then finding new trees to replace the old. Starting fresh because the old mix was not working at all.

Finding new trees means going ‘tree shopping’, a concept I had never encountered and it certainly was not on my ‘bucket list’ – although perhaps it should have been because now I could cross it off. Because, I want to tell you, I have now been tree shopping – we visited hundreds of plant nurseries – okay, it was not hundreds, but it was painful for me, so it at least felt like I had walked hundreds of miles through nurseries – okay, maybe it was 6 nurseries, but it felt like hundreds!

We had to start with the central tree –

the one she wanted to serve as a base, a central piece for the rest – and she had

decided that it needed to be a tree strong, majestic and able to support the others – every group needs a core, right?

So, she decided on a ‘bouleau noire’ (a black birch – and it took all 6 nurseries to find the right one) the questions was ‘what next’. We don’t have room for a lot – maybe 4 or 6 – so the question becomes ‘what goes with a black birch?’ Would a ‘white pine’ fit – would they be able to live in harmony – were their needs so different that one could not be a part of the group or that one would destroy the potential supportive

harmony of the group?

And if she decided, as she did, that a black birch and a white pine – well, wait, it was not a white pine, but a black pine



from somewhere in the USA – Colorado, I think – and she decided the two would work well together – be able to live in harmony, what was next? And the ‘black birch’ was not really black – it is more red, auburn, in colour – you never really know until you meet them face to face, do you? So, having decided (or discovered) that the black birch wasn’t black and the white pine was actually black, we moved on with a red birch and a black pine.

Ah, Canada, where there are so many different varieties and so many needing a home, and so little space. So, what goes with a ‘red’ birch and a ‘black’ pine – well, obviously a Canadian Hemlock – survives everywhere, gets along with all the others, does not threaten other species and adjusts to all conditions – a traditional Canadian compromising variety – so one of them too. A lovely example of the great Canadian mosaic.

Finally, the neighbour told us she had an uprooted basic fir which needed a place – and we had one. So, cultivating the soil as well as we might, we planted the last tree – one given to us by a neighbour who did not know what to do with it. And we welcomed it.

So, we only have 4 now – with room, we decided, for a few others – but we are going to take our time – see how it goes with the first four, and then see what may fit with the initial group of four.

Ah, that our system was so considerate, eh?

Thom



We are pleased to announce that with the next issue of *CYC-Online* (Issue 200),

James Freeman, MA,

Director of Training for Casa Pacifica Centers for Children and Families in California, USA, will be joining Brian Gannon and Thom Garfat as a co-editor on CYC-Net.

Many of you already know James, but if you do not, some information about him can be found here:

<http://www.cyc-net.org/People/people-freeman.html>



@CYCareworkers

Touch Something, Throw Something

Kiaras Gharabaghi

School of Child & Youth Care, Ryerson University

k.gharabaghi@ryerson.ca

Lately, I have come across quite a few residential ‘treatment’ programs that feature some odd design choices. In one such program, for example, the dinner tables were bolted to the floor. In another, there was simply nothing to be found anywhere that could be picked up; no decorations on the fire place mantle, no pictures on the wall, and not even dish soap by the kitchen sink. When I inquire about the rationale behind these design choices, I am told that these serve to protect the kids and the staff from harm. When there are things that can be picked up and thrown, kids apparently do so randomly, injuring each other and the staff frequently.

Now, I don’t want to mount my usual argument against the oppression of ‘safety



first’ mantras. But I will quickly digress, and once again suggest that the physical safety of kids in residential care and treatment ought to come eighth; yes, not first, but eighth. Some people find this to be an irresponsible argument. “If the kids aren’t physically safe, none of the other good work can happen”, they say. Or, “it is simply the responsibility of an organization to prevent physical harm to

staff and kids, so of course safety must be ranked first”. I believe this to be a fundamental thinking error. First, ranking safety eighth does not mean that it is not important. Quite to the contrary, given that there are at least 100 issues of considerable importance in residential treatment and care, a top ten ranking would suggest great importance! Secondly, safety is not a

static concept, nor is it one with a natural limit. If safety really ranks first, the kids ought to be wearing helmets, the staff ought to have defensive shields, and fire drills ought to happen daily, perhaps twice a day, not monthly as required by law (in Ontario). In fact, since almost every threat to physical safety is the result of at least two people making bad decisions, in the interest of safety we should just avoid having kids interact amongst themselves, and ideally limit interactions with staff too. This would, incidentally, completely eliminate physical harm from physical restraints, since that process surely requires some interaction between kids and staff.

Beyond the obvious reasons why 'safety first mantras' can never achieve their goal of eliminating risk, however, it is becoming quite apparent that such mantras are just too inviting for horrendous, and often destructive practices. They certainly promote some very antiquated institutional practices such as bolting down furniture and removing all throwable things from the home. They also limit the critical reflection process of residential teams. One might argue, for example, that residential programs that are having problems with kids throwing things at staff might do well to reflect on their overall approach to service delivery; likely a much better use of time than bolting things down.

Perhaps the most important reason, however, why I really vehemently object to these kinds of design decisions becoming more common in residential treatment settings is that they fundamentally violate everything we know about young people

impacted by trauma, autism and a range of mental health issues. For these young people, life is as much a cognitive experience as it is a sensory one. The need to touch things, pick them up, drop them, and yes, sometimes throw them, is an important one, and not always meant to threaten someone else's physical safety. Quite to the contrary, sensory needs are often associated with the need to exercise some control in one's physical environment, and to maintain capacity to make changes to that environment impulsively. For young people impacted by significant anxiety, just being able to touch an object of concern is a great relief.

We have already had similar discussions in the context of touch (physical touch amongst people). At least the child and youth care consensus is that touch is a fundamental requirement for healthy development; it is a human need, and ought to be a human right. I would urge residential treatment providers to extend this discussion to the design of the physical environment as well. Please make sure that young people in your care can exercise their sensory needs, and that they can pick things up, touch them, drop them, and throw them when necessary. If it becomes a problem from the perspective of an appropriately ranked safety regime, perhaps it is time to have a team meeting, discuss the way we are with kids, ensure that the kids have a voice in the program and how it unfolds every day and see if we can't shift the problem of things going airborne in ways that doesn't bring back the darker side of institutionalism.

Beware of the Big Bad Storyteller? An exploration of the therapeutic potential of bedtime reading from the perspective of young people and residential workers

Dawn Simpson

Abstract

Research evidence shows that for looked after and accommodated children, bedtime can be a traumatic and challenging time (Bettelheim, 1950; Conlon, 2005).

Additionally, research has identified that storytelling is a therapeutic activity for young people (Lamwaca, 2004; Morning, 2008; Stevens, Kirkpatrick and McNicol, 2008). The study discussed in this article examines the therapeutic potential of bedtime reading for young people in residential child care by exploring the related experiences of young people and children's workers in one large residential child care establishment. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with eight participants: three young people, four children's workers and one residential child care consultant. The findings from the research identified that all staff viewed bedtime reading as a therapeutic tool that enhanced their relationship with young people and supported the child's development. Young people stated that it was an enjoyable activity that helped them to feel safe, relaxed and closer to staff.

Keywords

Residential childcare; storytelling; bedtime reading; therapy

Many years ago, there lived a king who did not allow his subjects to learn. So, he posted signs all over the kingdom that stated, 'Beware of the Big Bad Storyteller'.

The king knew storytellers gave people

ideas. These ideas lead to people thinking, and then people might have ideas of their own and soon would want to learn to read and write or even put their ideas into action for themselves. The king was so



fearful he built a fortress to keep out the storytellers. That is, until one day a mighty good and curious storyteller arrived. He was warned by the king to leave. 'Well then', said the storyteller, 'I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in. Then I'll tell a tale and when I'm through, good-bye to you.' So he stood at the gates and he huffed and puffed a glorious tale that filled the town's people with wonderful ideas and excited their imagination. When he finished the tale the fortress tumbled down. Terrified, the king fled from the land. The town's people found the storyteller to be a kind man who told wonderful stories. The people enjoyed them so much they passed them on to their children and their children's children. And this, my friend, is why we are just as wise as we are today (Story adapted from Zipes, 1995).

Much like the people in the story, young people in care may not have been afforded the opportunity to have experiences such as storytelling. Unfortunately research indicates that many children's homes are not literacy-rich environments where books are readily available to young people and that staff are not knowledgeable about books (Poulton, 2012; Scottish Government, 2008). This limits opportunities for young people to benefit from being read or told stories, despite re-



search showing its therapeutic value (Lamwaca, 2004; Morning, 2008; Stevens, Kirkpatrick and McNicol, 2008).

This paper discusses a small-scale study, undertaken for the purposes of an undergraduate dissertation that examined the therapeutic potential of bedtime reading for children and young people in care. To achieve this, it explored the children's

workers' views and experiences of using bedtime reading to create a nurturing, caring and educationally rich environment. Additionally, the study sought the children's views and experiences of being read to by their workers.

The findings of study are underpinned by theoretical and research literature. Whilst it is noted that storytelling, reading and reading to young people at bedtime are not identical, they are not dissimilar and as a result this study explores the use of storytelling and reading, and their related benefits. This literature will be discussed first.

The Review of Literature

Storytelling is an ancient tradition worldwide. It evolved from the aspirations and dreams of 'common people' who, through the creation of stories, challenged their perceived social class and dissatisfaction with societal norms (Zipes, 1979).

Historically, storytelling has been utilised as a tool to enhance human development. Bettelheim (1991), a prominent author in the field of storytelling, advocated the use of fairy tales as a psychoanalytical tool to support child development. Bettelheim asserted that fairy tales provided children with emotional and symbolic messages that enabled them to gain meaning and purpose. Much like Freud's analysis of dreams, Bettelheim argued that if a child is deprived of stories it could inhibit their development (Dundes, 1991). Zipes (1995) criticised Bettelheim's theories for lacking scientific validity as he argued there was no evidence base to substantiate his theory. However, a research base has emerged since the time of Zipes' writing that contributes to the claims that storytelling has therapeutic potential for looked after and accommodated children. This research, much like Bettelheim's theory, emphasises the value of the story contributing to a child's emotional development.

Research has identified that reading and storytelling schemes have shifted young people's and residential workers' approaches to reading and enhanced young people's literacy, expression and language skills (Lamwaca, 2004; Linnane, 2008; McNicol & Kirkpatrick, 2005; Poulton, 2012; Stevens, Kirkpatrick and McNicol, 2008). Stevens et al. (2008) conducted a qualitative analysis of the impact a storytelling project had on the educational attainment of young people in residential child care in South Lanarkshire. 'Storyworks' trained staff and developed

storytelling workshops to support children and staff to tell and listen to stories. The findings indicated that storytelling increased young people's levels of confidence at school and they began to read for pleasure. This, in turn, nurtured their speech, imagination and comprehension skills. Additionally the research identified that storytelling enhanced the children's relationships with staff, had a calming effect on the children's unit, and provided a sense of community spirit where the children appeared to feel safe and relaxed. Edinburgh's Reading Champion Project (City of Edinburgh Council, 2010) identified similar outcomes where storytelling supported looked after and accommodated children to develop healthy attachments and resilience factors.

Lamwaca's (2004) study of orphaned Ugandan child soldiers identified that storytelling helped children who were victims of violence recover from flashbacks, panic attacks and isolation. It stimulated their imagination and emotional intelligence, and enabled them to share their experiences in a safe and non-threatening way. Additionally, listening to other people's stories gave them solace. A comparative analysis of the country's cultures and the needs of the young people suggest that while the Ugandan context is considerably different, the vulnerabilities and high levels of need are not completely dissimilar. Uganda has a strong cultural history of storytelling and this is akin to Scotland, which is steeped in traditional travellers' tales and folk tales.

Additionally it could be argued that the Ugandan children's experience is not com-

pletely unlike that of looked after and accommodated children in Scotland, as both have experienced trauma, loss and abuse (Kendrick, 1998). The development of theory and research on storytelling provides the foundation for the aforementioned small-scale study that is the focus of this article. Next, the study's methods and methodology are discussed.

Method

This study used a qualitative approach through the use of semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences. This enabled an exploration of practice that focused 'on the meaning of experiences by exploring how people define, describe and meta-

phorically make sense of these experiences' (Vanderstoep and Jonston, 2009, p.165). This research was granted ethical approval from the University of Strathclyde as it complied with their *Code of Practice on Investigations on Human Beings*. Tables 1 and 2 represent the background information of each participant.

With the exception of the residential child care consultant, all children's workers worked at the same residential school. The residential child care consultant had been employed to develop therapeutic practice in a children's home. All of young people interviewed had a learning difficulty. One the children was unable to comprehend open questions and required the use of closed questions; however, closed questions posed the risk of influencing the child's answer. To

Table 1: Qualifications and experience of residential staff

Participants	Qualifications level	Years working in Residential Child Care
Residential Child Care consultant	Undergraduate degree and masters.	0-5
Children's worker 1	In-house training.	0-5
Children's worker 2	Undergraduate degree.	5-10
Children's worker 3	Undergraduate degree and masters.	5-10
Children's worker 4	Undergraduate degree.	15+

Table 2: Age of children and years living in residential care

Participants	Age	Years lived in Residential Child Care
'Alex'	14	0-3
'Mary'	16	3-6
'Jamie'	17	6-9

mitigate this risk any information gained from questions that could be deemed leading was not included in the analysis. All young people's names have been changed to ensure their anonymity.

Findings

An analysis of participant responses identified four key themes. Three of the themes were selected because they were most frequently discussed throughout the interviews. They are: rhythms, rituals and routines, the role of the children's worker and the relationship. However, it was also important to include findings that were not as frequent in discussion but were significant because of their relevance to related difficulties and potential to inform practice. They comprise the final theme, which is about barriers and challenges of bedtime reading. Many of these challenges had been explored in research and therefore provided a valuable contribution to this paper.

Theory has been integrated into each theme to strengthen the paper's evidence base.

Rhythms, Rituals and Routines

When entering a children's home, one gains a sense of the environment; for children, this will influence their sense of feeling valued and cared for (Smith, 2009). To a guest and student researcher, the homes felt welcoming; they had a containing milieu that appeared educationally rich due to the children's easy access to music,

books and poetry. A residential milieu refers to the 'feel' of the residential environment (Smith, 2009, p. 87). This concept evolved from a holistic understanding of how everyday events affect a child's development (Bettelheim, 1950). The workers appeared to place significant value on the principles of creating a residential milieu rich in rhythms, routines and rituals, much like Steiner's (1996) concept of creating school timetables around the rhythms of the day. Workers identified that children have a natural rhythm of learning that is strengthened through routines:

A rhythmic day is best for our young people, to know what's going to happen ... a kind of rhythmic holding ... a child knows, 'I'm going to have a bath, get into clean pyjamas and someone will read me a story.' That's something they can count on in that part of the day. It's calming, comforting, soothing
– (Residential child care Consultant).

Workers viewed bedtime as fundamental time during each child's day where they were often restless, anxious, hyperactive or could exhibit challenging behaviour:

The nervous system of these children may have been traumatised or maltreated. Their nervous system can get aroused, especially at night time
– (Residential Child Care Consultant).

The workers advocated the need to recognise not only the challenges bedtime presents but the therapeutic potential



through using bedtime reading as a versatile and engaging approach to supporting their young people in the evening:

There is no doubt a good night sleep is essential and if a pupil is not sleeping well then we experience the repercussions the next day ... helping them have a good night sleep is essential and reading stories is part of that
– (Children's Worker 2).

Rhythms provide children and their carers with a sense of togetherness; attuning their internal rhythms with their environment influences their quality of relationships and attachments (Maier, 1987). Reading is rich in rhythm; workers identified that the rhythms of storytelling helped young people to feel calm and safe through enabling their internal rhythmic energy to relax and slow down in preparation for sleep:

The voice, the movements and breathing, it is one of our basic rhythms that we all have and need and I think it's creating a calm peaceful rhythm by reading. It probably influences the child ... one can see it and hear it, movements are getting slower, the rhythm slows down the child in a way – (Children's Worker 3).

Young people identified what might be considered the rhythmic quality of bedtime reading as well:

When you can listen to what they're saying, their voice is nice. I like when they change voices and stuff – (Mary).

Workers discussed in great depth the importance of routines; routines that differed from the kind of institutional routines intended to maintain social control and meet the needs of the service provider. Alternatively their approach reflected Maier's (1987) belief that routines provide young people with a sense of safety, as they know how their day will end:

When I know they are going to read me a story, then I know it's going to be relaxing – (Alex).

Them knowing the routine of a story coming, it helped ... to know you're coming in with a story ... that's a trusting relationship, a bond ... if they know it's coming the next day at a similar time then there's comfort in that
– (Children's Worker 1).

Rituals are the 'social counterpart to psychological rhythmicity' and are symbolic of culture and togetherness (Maier, 1987, p.115). Within residential child care, rituals can hold great significance as they grow to represent a sense of community (Smith, 2009). All workers referred to various bedtime rituals that included praying together, playing a lyre and lighting a candle:

One lit candle, turned down the lights, kids came like a moth to a flame ... they gathered around, it was beautiful, a reverential space, their attention, presence and care, something slowed

down a rhythm, they came with such curiosity and not a destructive or disturbing energy
– (Residential Child Care Consultant).

This description appears to encapsulate the combined use of rhythms, rituals and routines supporting young people to co-regulate. Co-regulation is a term that describes a process through which young people are supported by staff to manage emotional arousal such that they gradually learn to anticipate soothing support with the long-term aim of helping them to self-manage their emotions, behaviour or energy (Bath, 2008). This approach embraces the environment of the children's home to provide a containing space for young people to settle in the evening.

The role of the Residential Worker

The children's workers appeared to view their role as educators through using everyday activities, directly and indirectly, to enhance the development of the whole child. This was evident when they discussed purposefully selecting a book that has educational or developmental value for a child:

What kind of stories have you read with the children? – (Interviewer)

At about the age they're studying the Romans they begin to explore the society the Romans had and explore democracy so often in the classroom they'll make class rules ... so we'll read stories about the Romans ... the stories can mirror

what needs to be happening developmentally within the child and how we can support that to happen in a very indirect way – (Children's Worker 2).

Additionally, the workers identified that a significant part of the children's workers' role was to provide young people with support to enable them to overcome challenges and adversity. This view was reflected in their approach to bedtime reading:

There is a social aspect [to bedtime reading] it's about tolerance, it helps [young people] see things that they may not see in life ... in a gentler form perhaps. So something can be approached in a story that maybe they find difficult during the day
– (Children's Worker 4).

Kids will ask to hear the same story time and time again because there's a message that has resonated with them ... it might be about losing a parent, going on an adventure where they find their own identity, developing morality –
(Children's Worker 2).

Tolkien (cited in Bettelheim, 1991, p.143) identifies that stories often have four parts: fantasy, recovery, escape and consolation. The residential child care consultant discussed how these stories can provide looked after and accommodated children with a heroic role model where a central character overcomes trials and tribulations and gains heroic status:



The stories and fairy tales are an antidote, they provide pictures of a human being that struggles to become good and can become good, triumph over cruelty ... A story of a young person tossed from home, much like children in care's experiences, sent through trials and tribulations before they return with their nobility acknowledged
– (Residential Child Care Consultant).

These stories could offer temporary or permanent solutions that contribute to the formation of a young person's identity, enabling them to view themselves not as a victim or villain but a hero on a quest to find their sense of self (Bettelheim, 1991; Morning, 2008). Phelan (2000) asserts that it is the role of children's workers to support young people to have experiences free from labels, barriers and disability. He asserts that a young person's poor childhood care experience can affect their view of future relationships. This is referred to in attachment literature as a young person's internal working model (Daniel, Wassell, and Gilligan, 2010). These poor childhood experiences can result in children experiencing current relationships through the lens of those that they experienced in their childhood. Phelan argues that this affects their ability to fully experience the present moment with a care giver; he refers to this impact as the 'twin pincers of past defeat and future hopelessness' (2000, p.13). For example, 'Alex' had moved from a different country to this children's home. His experience resonates with stories of heroes who go on a journey and face trials and tribulations:

What do you need in stories to make them good? – (Interviewer)

Friendship, funny, adventure yeah that's the biggest one, facing lots of gods, beasts and stuff ... when I go on an adventure and when Bilbo [from Lord of the Rings (Tolkien, 1954)] goes on an adventure it's really fun! – (Alex)

Alex would consistently refer back to *Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954) throughout our conversation focusing on Bilbo's heroism and adventure. It could be suggested Alex's worker may have created an experience that enabled Alex to hear stories that were akin to his own journey, that challenged his view of himself and the world, and that could help him to develop a more positive self-image; however, there are ongoing debates regarding the extent to which internal working models can be changed (Daniel, Wassell and Gilligan, 2010).

Bettelheim (1991) argues that children are attracted to stories that relate to their emotional, psychological, physical and relational development. This view was reflected by those workers who had the highest educational attainment; they identified the value of the story as potentially holding metaphorical meaning for the children. This suggests that the children's workers' role is to understand the developmental needs of the young people and have the skills and knowledge to purposefully select stories that have development value for children. In order to do this, a working knowledge of developmental theory is necessary.

The Relationship

The young people all expressed feelings of enjoyment and closeness to their worker:

When they read me a story it's funny and I get closer to them like best friends (Alex). [Bedtime reading] can make me feel closer to them – (Mary).

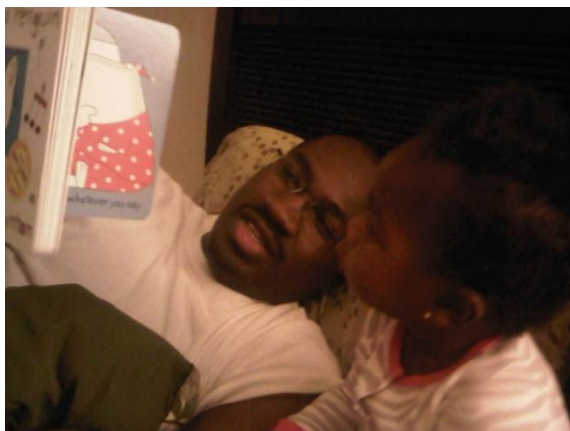
I like when [Children's Worker] reads me stories – (Jamie).

These feelings of closeness were also shared by all workers who viewed bedtime reading as an intimate time when the children feel a sense of belonging and safety, the most basic of human needs (Maslow, 1971). These shared activities could contribute towards the potential for the workers to become a secure base for their young person. All participants spoke about how a story enables them to share an experience and adventure together:

We can interact through the story. It means he can lie down and listen to my voice and it is about the story that we can share and both enjoy and he can just get a bit of my emotion through how I

read the story ... you've got this pure trusting space ... it's so exciting and we both can't stop being excited about it together ... I love it. It's storytelling and it's just great
– (Children's Worker 1).

It is noteworthy that this worker discusses sharing his emotions and uses the word 'love' to describe his commitment to the activity. This suggests a level of closeness which may enable a young person to have a healing connection with the worker. The worker's enthusiasm and passion for bedtime reading was evident throughout both the workers' and the young people's



descriptions. This suggests that the value of bedtime reading is not based solely on the activity itself but on the genuine commitment and care that workers (and arguably young people) bring to the practice. This is significant as it demonstrates that shared activities are

not necessarily therapeutic; it is the worker's thinking and approach that enhance its potential to enrich the therapeutic relationship and nurture the child's wellbeing.

Workers identified that bedtime reading provided them with time to wind down from the events of the day. It gave them space to reconnect with young people:

You experience this kind of intimacy where you forget that the person you are reading to is maybe very challenging throughout the day or that you yourself may not have been at your best and that can all sort of fall away at the hand of the story that you're reading together...you feel this sense of security and relax. It's just this eye-to-eye meeting without kind of judgements or disability clouding the whole encounter
– (Children's Worker 2).

Many young people enter care with considerable pain-based behaviours stemming from feelings of abandonment or previous experiences of abuse, and they can project these onto the worker (Anglin, 2002). Children's Worker 1 identified that understanding the child's needs and his own needs encouraged them to reunite through their bedtime reading routine and consolidate their differences:

We had a discussion and he said, 'You don't care for me and you don't like me,' and in the end it was the story. I told him I would love to read him a story and how important it is for us ... this positive ending to the day. It's great
– (Children's Worker 1).

Bedtime reading appeared to have ameliorative value for the workers and not just the young people. Workers said it provided them with time to relax and to experience a journey together with the young person. This experience enabled them to reconnect and rebuild their rela-

tionship through a bedtime story. The benefits that workers receive through the residential milieu are rarely explored in literature. However, the workers' insight enables consideration of the benefits, for both workers and young people, of choosing to relax with children after conflicts rather than away from the children; this is an area that may benefit from further research.

Barriers and Challenges of Bedtime Reading

Children's Workers 2, 3 and 4 likened their experiences of reading to young people to their own personal experience:

When I think about my own experiences of parents reading to me it was very nice, that warm sort of embrace. Someone taking time to care for you where you have that intimate cuddly moment. We don't necessarily do this with our pupils but the gestures are still the same
– (Children's Worker 2).

Their reflections demonstrated the value they placed on giving other children the positive caregiving experiences they themselves had as a child or have had with their own children. Alternatively, the residential child care consultant identified that some workers had their own adverse life experiences, had no personal experiences of being read to and potentially as a result did not value bedtime reading. Additionally, a lack of training and literary skills, along with employers who do not promote edu-

cationally rich environments, can inhibit their practice of bedtime reading in the sector more widely. An overview of the reading schemes in children's homes in Scotland identified that a significant barrier was children's workers inadequate knowledge of literature, poor literacy skills, lack of confidence and negative attitudes towards reading (Poulton, 2012; Scottish Government, 2008). Additionally, books were not easy to access or available in children's homes (Scottish Government, 2008b). Whilst the residential child care consultant identified that the workers were not encouraged to enhance their own educational attainment in the field of child care generally, in contract, the children's workers in the study placed significant value on their education influencing their practice:

Getting to do the BA and having some theoretical input ... changed my attitude and how I looked at my role! I'm the one who's supposed to help [the young person]. His day can stand and fall with my attitude and inner values...unless I'm going to learn develop and grow there's no way I can help him develop and grow – (Children's Worker 3).

The children's workers in this study have worked in an environment that promotes education in its widest sense; however, research has identified that there still remains significant concern that many workers are not adequately supported by their employers. Electing appropriate books requires an understanding of the

benefits of reading: diversion, inspiration, escape and role modelling. This, therefore, requires employers to provide their staff with training on children's literature, child development and storytelling to help develop their knowledge, improve their confidence and ultimately improve the experiences of looked after and accommodated children.

Care experiences can instigate residual distress for some young people in care; this can have an impact on their behaviour, mood and sense of safety at bedtime when they feel more vulnerable (Conlon, 2005). Workers identified that for some young people, bedtime can be challenging. However, only one worker identified that for some young people bedtime reading could be upsetting:

Yes it's challenging when [bedtime reading] stirs up something difficult for the child. It didn't happen often; you think you're having story time and it turns into something quite serious that can be a bit of a throwback – (Children's worker 4).

This worker identified that for some children bedtime reading could instigate traumatic memories. Bessel van der Kolk (2005) describes trauma as 'the experience of multiple, chronic and prolonged, developmentally adverse traumatic events, most often of an interpersonal nature...and early life onset' (p. 402). Bedtime for looked after and accommodated children can trigger hyperarousal, hypervigilance or avoidant behaviours; behaviours that are similar to symptoms of



post-traumatic stress disorder. Conlon's (2005) research provided evidence of the importance of creating an environment that supports children physically and emotionally for bedtime. Conlon identified that maximum emotional support occurred when staff shared activities with young people. As identified by the children's worker, the use of bedtime reading does not remove the chance that night time may instigate traumatic memories for young people; however, the themes discussed above – rhythms, rituals, routines, the relationship and the children's workers' role – may minimise this risk and potentially nurture a young person's sense of safety, identity and belonging, thus enhancing their emotional and physical wellbeing.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research brought to life the bedtime reading experiences of children's workers and the children who live in residential child care. It provided initial evidence to enhance our understanding of the therapeutic potential of bedtime reading. However, the fundamental purpose of this research is to positively influence individual and organisational residential child care practice. Research has identified that many children's homes do not have books readily available for young people and children's workers do not have the confidence, experience or literacy skills to implement storytelling. The children's workers' and residential child care consultant's descriptions demonstrated inspiring

residential practice. Fundamental to this, however, was their understanding of child development, the residential milieu and their approach to using activities to enhance children's emotional wellbeing. Many workers associated this knowledge with their educational attainment in child care.

This suggests that to enable our young people to grow and develop in an educationally rich environment we must give our children's workers the same opportunity. Much like the story of the king who banished all the storytellers from his kingdom so his people could not learn, if we allow our children in care to be brought up in a world free from stories and books, we reduce the likelihood that they will develop into strong, confident and knowledgeable adults.

References

- Anglin, J. (2002). *Pain, normality and the struggle for congruence: Reinterpreting residential child care for children and youth*. New York: The Haworth Press.
- Bath, I. (2008). Calming together: The pathway to self-control. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 14 (6), 44-46.
- Bettelheim, B. (1950). *Love is not enough*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.
- Bettelheim, B. (1991). *The uses of enchantment: the meaning and importance of fairy tales*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- City of Edinburgh Council (2010). *Reading champion project*.
- Conlon, M. (2005). Creating a safe place to sleep: an analysis of night care staff interventions to reduce evening and

- night-time disturbance in residential care unit, *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*, 4 (2), 1-9.
- Daniel, B., Wassell, S. & Gilligan, R. (2010). *Child development for child care and protection workers* (2nd Ed.). London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Dundes, A. (1991). Bruno Bettelheim's uses of enchantment and abuses of scholarship. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 104 (411), 74-83.
- Kendrick, A. (1998). In their best interest? Protecting children from abuse in residential and foster care. *International Journal of Child and Family Welfare*, 3 (2), 169-185.
- Lamwaca, B. (2004). *The power of storytelling and reading in healing children orphaned by war in northern Uganda* (Paper given at the 29th World Congress of the International Board on Books for Young People, Cape Town, South Africa). Retrieved from http://www.nabuur.com/files/attach/2008/10/task/doc_45bec6fdc42c7.pdf
- Linnane, C. (2008). Encouraging reading among children in care: The Edinburgh reading champion project. *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*, 7 (2), 25-27.
- Maier, H. (1987). *Developmental group care of children and youth: concepts and practice*. London: The Haworth Press.
- Maslow, A. (1971). *The farther reaches of human nature*. New York: Viking.
- Morning, C. (2008). *Opening their treasures they offered him gifts: the broken and unopened gifts of relationship in residential childcare*. Retrieved from www.allianceforchildhood.org.uk/.../Opening_Their_Treasures.pdf
- Phelan, J. (2000). Another look at activities. *Journal of Child and Youth Care*, 14 (2), 1-7.
- Poulton, L. (2012). *Looked-after children and literacy: A brief review*. London: National Literacy Trust.
- Scottish Government (2008). *Evaluation of Reading Rich*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Smith, M. (2009). *Rethinking residential child care: positive perspectives*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Steiner, R. (1996). *The child's changing consciousness as the basis of pedagogical practice*. Hudson: Anthroposophic Press.
- Stevens, I., Kirkpatrick, R. & McNicol, C. (2008). Improving literacy through storytelling in residential care. *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*, 7 (2), 28-39.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. (1954). *The lord of the rings*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- University of Strathclyde. (2013). *Code of practice on investigations involving human beings*
- Van Der Kolk, B. (2005). *Child abuse and victimisation*. Retrieved from www.traumacenter.org/.../Preprint_Child_Abuse_Victimization.pdf
- Vanderstop, S. & Jonston, D. (2009). *Research methods for everyday life: Blending quantitative and qualitative approaches*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Zipes, J. (1979). *Breaking the magic spell: radical theories of folk and fairy tales*. London: Heinemann.
- Zipes, J. (1995). *Creative Storytelling: Building community changing lives*. New York: Routledge.

From: *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*, April 2014 – Vol.13, No.1, 4-14



Clinical CYC Practice

Jack Phelan

Explaining CYC practice to other people should be a lot easier than it actually is. I find that when I get together with some CYC practitioners, there is little need to re-examine our basic premises or filter our conversations. A recent trip to Cape Town, South Africa to be at the NACCW conference and with over 1000 colleagues was a good example of not needing to quibble about differences. Even though I am sure there were lots of specific instances for separate interpretations of who we are, they did not emerge, and were not important. There were larger principles and connections that made the small points irrelevant. I also found this true when talking with colleagues from Sweden and Denmark who attended. Perhaps it is because we were away from our workplaces and could think more grandly about our professional mission.

Talking about CYC clinical practice, the why and how of our work, can create some surprising disagreements fairly quickly. I want to give you my understanding as well as a few of my frustrations with these conversations. Clinical CYC practice is both developmentally focused and relational, and takes place in the life space of both the people being helped and the

helper. It is not the total life space of the helper, she also has a life separate from the work, but it often is the total life space of the other person. In order for the CYC practitioner to be useful, he must be attuned to the developmental logic and relational ability of the other person, and be able to respectfully join them at that point. When this happens well, both people feel connected, safe, and understood. The CYC practitioner is both outside her own comfort zone and grounded in her professional competence, so that she can hear and react with humility, not judgment. Being fully in another person's life space means that it is your life space too, even if only to be helpful. The ability to do this safely takes years of experience and skillful practice. The lack of personal safety intrinsic to life space work is also the greatest asset because it is exactly this lack of safety which is hindering the change work which the youth or family is trying to embark upon. When this unsafe space is a shared space, the possibilities for relational connecting and developmental understanding are greatly enhanced. Until that connection is established and dually acknowledged, the helper is merely another advice giver who wouldn't take their own

advice if they really understood the situation.

I am frustrated with people who do counselling of one form or another, using an office and sitting in a chair, who declare that this is CYC work. It is not in my eyes. I am frustrated with people who work in schools or community centers who do not go out into the neighborhood or visit families, but say they are CYC people. Life space work is an essential piece of our work as much as relational approaches and developmental perspectives.

Behavioral approaches are criticized as ineffective and not really clinical, and I agree with this up to a point. Behavioral approaches, both in youth and family work, are very helpful to create safety and predictability, which are fundamental to life space work. They are terribly overused in many places, because these control techniques keep the staff safe, so they can be a real problem, but there is a place for them. Agencies and schools that use Level systems or other behavior modification approaches, except with cognitively limited youth, should re-examine their methods.

Effective CYC practitioners have both a theory of clinical practice and a belief about change that guides their actions. They are also very physically aware and affected by the work, monitoring personal emotional and physical responses as they do their work. There is little CYC work done sitting down and almost none done from behind a desk.

Always wanted to get your writing published but didn't know where to start, or who to go to?

We're here to help.



The
CYC-Net
PRESS

info@cycnetpress.cyc-net.org

VISIT OUR BOOK STORE AT
<http://cycnetpress.cyc-net.org>
ALL PROFITS GO DIRECTLY TO



Changing Scenes in California's System for Youth in Care

James Freeman

Young people in care benefit when child and youth care practitioners are aware of and empowered to address changes in the systems of care which impact them and their families. This article reviews significant changes occurring in the context of the care system in California and the United States as a means to promote discussion and action.

Young people in care benefit when child and youth care practitioners are aware of and empowered to address changes in the systems of care which impact them and their families. Systemic rules and processes can limit or expand access to critical developmental relationships and experiences. This is acutely important for those at risk of the trauma related to multiple and disrupted placements across the various ecologies in which their lives unfold.

There are a number of significant changes happening across the United States and, more specifically, in the state of California related to the experience of young people in care. This is of significance globally as California has been more and more mentioned as a bellwether or indicator of change.

Perhaps it is also like a canary in a coal mine, a reference to the caged birds coal miners carried into their tunnels as a safety device. When the bird died it indicated the presence of toxic gases and signaled a warning to get out to fresh air as soon as possible. Young people in care may be more susceptible to adverse changes in our world - and thus provide us an early indication or warning of dangerous conditions.

Readers can decide if this is desirable or undesirable, yet either way it serves as an example for the changing world which exists for today's young people in care.

Child Welfare Reform

Legislation is forming in our state assembly which has suggested a range of

actions including the elimination of emergency shelters, restructuring of group homes into short-term residential treatment centers, development of new funding structures, and re-branding of foster homes into resource families (California Department of Social Services, 2015). So far the department of social services has done research, engaged providers, listened to youth focus groups, and produced a legislative report. The suggestions are now being reviewed by legislative bodies and draft bills are expected to be signed and enacted by the state governor within the next few months.

Support for Transitional Age Youth

A number of young people today are benefiting from a law enacted just three years ago which provides young people the option to remain in care and access support for transitional housing or supervised independent living through age 21. Funding is minimal, however, and there are limits on who is eligible, such as placement in child welfare or probation systems and the ability to stay employed or in school (Chronicle for Social Change, 2013).

Crisis Services

Other legislation in development is focused on expanding licensing categories specific to crisis stabilization and residential programs in an effort to reduce unnecessary stays in psychiatric hospitals. One analysis of the draft bill explains:

Currently, an estimated three out of every four children in the U.S. that need mental health services, do not receive them. Nearly 20% of high school students in California consider suicide at some point in their lives and more than 10% actually attempt it. With 47 out of 58 counties lacking any child/adolescent psychiatric hospital inpatient beds for children under 12 (and fewer than 70 beds statewide), the need for children's crisis residential services could not be more acute...this critically needed service - both in lieu of inpatient care and as a step down from inpatient care - is missing from the continuum of care. (Assembly Committee on Health, 2015)

This is not a surprise to the public as it has been discussed for over a decade



on-site
**professional
development**

Contact us for
information on
CYC training for
your staff &
community.

Darlene Navarro
dnavarro@casapacifica.org
805-366-4064

Priority dates for 2016
are now available.

www.casapacifica.org/training

Casa Pacifica is a proud supporter of CYC-Net &
encourages everyone to support this vital resource.



without an actionable plan in place (Forster, Wissing & Soleng, 2001).

Length of Stay in Care

There also remains a growing focus on the length of time young people may be placed in group care. The federal government has been discussing ways to limit access to group care (United States Senate Committee on Finance, 2015) and discussions to date have included proposed legislation that would "cut off funding for children under age 13 living in group homes for longer than 15 days [and] end funding for children over 13 after they had spent a year in such a facility" (Sapien, 2015). So far these seemingly arbitrary limits have not passed but continue to be explored by the senate finance committee.

Educationally-Related Mental Health

All of this is occurring in the context of a recent realignment of who owns the responsibility to provide mental health services to children. This change, just three years old:

...ended the state mandate on county mental health agencies to provide mental health services to students with disabilities [and made it] clear that school districts are now solely responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities receive special education and related services, including some services previously arranged for or provided by county mental health agencies. (California Department of Education, 2011)

So the task of identifying and referring young people for mental health services was moved from local mental health departments to individual school districts. The responsibility is now under the banner of educationally-related mental health services (referenced as ERMHS) which is intended to support students in reaching their educational goals. Most schools were caught unprepared to recognize the need, and make appropriate referrals, for mental health services (California Mental Health Planning Council, 2015).

Some of these changes show a positive impact and were long overdue. Others are loaded with damaging or potentially mixed outcomes. We all want children to grow up and be nurtured in the context of a caring family. But some need more support - and it's our responsibility to make sure the systems of care don't add to the struggles they have already experienced.

Opportunities

Along with these changes (for better or worse) we remain without a national, coordinated program for recruiting and sustaining a robust, skilled, caring child and youth care workforce and a pool of skilled foster parents. This task is left to individual states and a number of them, including California, delegate the task to local counties. As a result local communities are highly impacted by the resources local organizations offer (or don't offer) to the region. Thus, the range in the quality of care for young people also varies greatly

by county or region.

One factor in the disparity of quality care in a number of California counties is the perceived restriction of training funds within local county borders. Some counties have training resources and others don't. The foster care ombudsman reports that this is a significant factor in the disparity of quality of care across the state, highlighting that in higher quality group homes:

The staff were well trained on the values and purpose of the program and actually modeled those values. The staff demonstrated that they enjoyed working with children, youth, and families and practiced appropriate therapeutic interventions. The staff were mature and professional and excellent role models for the youth. (California Department of Social Services, 2011)

These programs, the ombudsman's report continues, have lower staff turn-over, a stable organizational culture, and provide opportunities for advancement. In lower quality group homes the levels of training and development were either missing or significantly less.

Summary

There is much to be done in response to these changing times. Young people in care will benefit when we are aware of, and empowered to address, changes in the systems of care which impact them and their families. We need to promote and empower young people themselves to



AVAILABLE IN SEPTEMBER,
a new title by
Leon Fulcher and Thom Garfat –

CHILD AND YOUTH CARE PRACTICE with Families

[Mail us here to receive an instructors
review copy.](#)



speak up and have their voice heard. The systems in which they live need to hear from them.

We also need to maintain awareness of what is happening at the legislative and government levels. What is happening in your region? How can you become more knowledgeable about the future of care?

And finally, we need to continue to develop ourselves, our peers, and the workforce in general with characteristics and skills that support young people in meaningful ways and make a significant impact on their behalf.

References

- Assembly Committee on Health. (2015). *Bill analysis: AB 741*. Retrieved from http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/15-16/bill/asm/ab_0701-0750/ab_741_cfa_20150418_120348_asm_comm.html
- California Department of Education. (2011). *AB 114 Special Education Transition*. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/ac/ab114twg.asp>
- California Department of Social Services. (2015). *California's child welfare continuum of care reform*. Retrieved from http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/entries/pdf/CCR_LegislativeReport.pdf
- California Department of Social Services. (2011). *The foster care ombudsman group home report card: A qualitative study of 42 California group homes*. In *Office of the California foster care ombudsman fiscal year 2010/2011 annual report* (p. 27-41). Retrieved from <http://www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov/PDFs/2010-2011AnnualReport.pdf>
- California Mental Health Planning Council (2015). *Transition of mental health services for students with disabilities*. Retrieved from <http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Documents/CMHPCAB114%20Report.pdf>
- Chronicle for Social Change. (2013). *AB 12: A promise in progress*. Retrieved from <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/featured/ab12-a-promise-in-progress/3139>
- Forster, P., Wissing, K. & Soleng, T. (2001). *Psychiatric hospital beds in California: Reduced numbers create system slow-down and potential crisis: A report from the California Institute for Mental Health*. Retrieved from http://www.cibhs.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/acute_services_report_final_0.pdf
- Sapien, J. (2015). *Congress to consider scaling down group homes for troubled children*. Retrieved from <https://www.propublica.org/article/congress-to-consider-scaling-down-group-homes-for-troubled-children>
- United States Senate Committee on Finance. (2015). *Hatch statement at finance hearing on foster care group homes*. Retrieved from <http://www.finance.senate.gov/newsroom/chairman/release/?id=5b561a56-d87f-4e0d-804d-47620a7cface>

JAMES FREEMAN is the training director for Casa Pacifica Centers for Children and Families in California USA, the president of the Child and Youth Care Certification Board, and serves on the board of the American Association of Children's Residential Centers. He can be reached at jfreeman@casapacifica.org



VISIT OUR CYC BOOK STORE AT

<http://cycnetpress.cyc-net.org>

IN SUPPORT OF



The
CYC-Net
PRESS

email: info@cycnetpress.cyc-net.org



The Fear of Non-Doing

Paul Paget

Introduction

The busy, dynamic nature of life-space work can overwhelm some child and youth care practitioners and, consequently, lead them to cope by mitigating the complexities of relational practice. In place of reflective, self-aware, and contextually informed practices, distressed practitioners may employ more rigid, externally driven, and albeit linear approaches to care (Gharabaghi & Phelan, 2011). However, when this starts becoming normative for individuals or teams of practitioners, then their reflective capacity for understanding relational dynamics between themselves and the youths with whom they work – as well as the structural and cultural dimensions of the life-space – are diminished. Over time, this can lead to an overly reactive disposition to working with youths, which the author here describes as the “fear of non-doing”.

Saving Time and Energy to Inevitably Waste It

Empirically speaking, practitioners who subscribe to more linear approaches (e.g. reward and punishment, point-level, and behaviour modification systems) also have a tendency to respond reactively to the challenges of relational work. When young people’s behaviour is reduced to acts of adherence and acts of defiance, some youths who behave “defiantly” can test the patience of any practitioner and increase the likelihood a quick and punitive response. A linear approach for perceiving and responding to young people’s challenges can leave practitioners forming rapid-fire conclusions about how they ought to intervene and why. It’s as though personal care gets rendered into a paint-by-numbers exercise.

Some practitioners adopt linear ap-

proaches to cope with feeling overwhelmed by life-space work. In doing so, they delude themselves into thinking they have more time and energy to adequately perform their jobs. This thinking is fallacious because, firstly, CYC practice is about the ways that we engage youth in daily life events, not the events *themselves* and how expediently or problem-free they unfold. Secondly, in trying to save time and energy by utilizing linear approaches, practitioners end up having to respond to the same circumstances over and over again. When practitioners deal with young people's challenging behavioural patterns by referencing them against a code of conduct and administering a corresponding punishment, or by constantly monitoring youth to discourage a repeat of such behaviours, no developmental work is done to help youths become more self-aware.

Creating opportunities for youths to mentally and emotionally process their behavioural patterns empowers them to gain perspective on how their actions affect self, others, and their surroundings (Phelan, 2008). This also helps inform youths of how effectively their behaviour is meeting their overall needs and whether there are potentially healthier alternatives to do so (Garfat, 2002). However, when opportunities for mental and emotional processing are not provided by practitioners, young people's sense of need or desire to change their behaviour is not internalized, increasing the probability that they will continue behaving in the same old ways (Phelan, 2008). In turn, practitioners will continue spending time and energy responding to

the same issues with little to no sense of progress. Additionally, their perceived lack of impact is likely to further exacerbate their reactions and lack of patience towards youths who challenge them.

Non-Doing

If non-reflective, linear approaches become habitual and go unchallenged by frontline practitioners and other colleagues like supervisors, practitioners may begin to believe that a sense of control and influence can only be derived from the constant, immediate management of young people and the events within the life-space. The ingrained belief that one must perpetually manage youth can inhibit a practitioner's ability to take pause to calmly observe and experience the dynamic between self, others, and the surrounding environment. In such cases, pausing or "non-doing" can be anxiety provoking. If immediate responses and swift results are the expectations of the individual practitioner, their colleagues, and the practice environment in general, practitioners' interventions may become driven by a chronic angst that could be conceptualized as the "fear of non-doing". Below are some examples of more or less conscious thoughts that a practitioner may experience while struggling with the "fear of non-doing".

- Pausing to reflect a moment too long may cause the youth to interpret this pause as an endorsement of their behaviour or negligence to keep them in line.



- Taking too much time to reflect may cause things to further unravel, leading to a loss of control over the youth and the environment and a bigger set of issues to deal with.
- Refraining from responding immediately may lead colleagues to believe that one is incompetent, unprofessional, or shirking their job responsibilities.
- Taking time to handle issues may obstruct one from finishing all the other things they must do (e.g. paperwork, phone calls, picking up groceries).
- Acting is better than lingering in uncertainty, which may lead to a loss of control over the youth and the environment.

What the above examples all reflect are rash, self-concluding assessments about others' perceptions of the practitioner who is struggling with the "fear of non-doing". This implies that meaning is only being constructed within the self and not *with others*. The examples also indicate that a lack of contextual awareness and understanding (what the practitioner is avoiding to save time and energy and, essentially, stress) is a significant contribution to the practitioner's anxiety. By limiting how deeply they are willing to relationally engage with youths and their surroundings, they simultaneously limit their capacity to be responsive and affect change. The result is the deferment of one's anxiety to the future in exchange for a temporary moment of relief. Just as young people's developmental capacity for growth is limited by linear, non-reflective approaches,

the practitioner who employs such approaches limits himself or herself whilst maintaining the anxiety he or she thinks they are avoiding.

In describing the nature of non-doing, mindfulness researcher and practitioner, Kabat-Zinn, states that

the only way you can do anything of value is to have the effort come out of non-doing and to let go of caring whether it will be of use or not. Otherwise, self-involvement and greediness can sneak in and distort your relationship to the work, or the work itself, so that it is off in some way, biased, impure, and ultimately not completely satisfying, even if it is good work (1994, p.39).

Adapting Kabat-Zinn's observations of "non-doing" to the context of child and youth care, one can see the pitfalls of using linear practice approaches. So much time and effort are squandered by holding onto a particular way of perceiving and responding to the challenges of youth, depriving practitioners of a deeper contextual understanding of their interactions with young people, colleagues, and the life-space setting.

Linear practice approaches predetermine the meanings and necessary responses to young people's challenges. Hence, they are *prescriptive* and obstruct practitioners from seeing and experiencing what is *actually* happening. Alternatively, when practitioners allow themselves to practice "non-doing" by taking moments to simply observe what is unfolding between themselves, youth(s), and the surrounding environment, they create an

opportunity to become present and *gather* context, enabling them to take *informed*, not *prescribed*, action. When there is always more to be observed, understood, felt, and experienced, working and being with youth can remain interesting and rewarding because there remains the hope and possibility of new ways to connect and be effective. Linear approaches, however, swing away from the hope and possibilities of relational practice. They lead practitioners to judge the quality of their work against the level of obedience demonstrated by the youth. That said, even if there are more good days (obedient days) than bad days, an environment that always runs according to the schedule of the life-space would become pretty boring after a while. If control over the youths and the environment is the ultimate goal and is suddenly attained, what is left to be accomplished? What new and inspiring experiences with young people are left to be explored?

Conclusion

When practitioners utilize linear practice approaches centred on controlling youth and the life-space environment, this does not help them free up more time and energy for adequately handling the demands of their work. More importantly, it contributes nothing to the development of young people's self-awareness, nor their capacity to consider and experience different ways of being with self, others, and their environment. Because of this, youths often continue behaving in the same ways,

reinforcing the false belief held by some practitioners that youths must be constantly controlled or monitored. Over time, this belief can afflict practitioners with a chronic angst that plays out as an urgent need to react and restore order whenever young people start getting rowdy and stray from rigid rules and expectations. The author described this phenomenon as the "fear of non-doing". Given child and youth care is a relational field, premised in an ecological way of thinking and being with others, it is imperative that practitioners take up the practice of "non-doing". Taking moments to simply *be* – observing and noticing what is happening *within* and *without* self is necessary to understanding what we are thinking and feeling. Only then can what we *do* something more consciously, be more intentionally, effective, and experience this work as ultimately fulfilling.

References

- Garfat, T. (2002) All behaviour serves a purpose. Retrieved from <http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0502-editor.html>
- Gharabaghi & Phelan (2011) Beyond control: staff perceptions of accountability for children and youth in residential care. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth*, 28, p. 75-90
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994) *Wherever you go there you are: mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York, New York: Hyperion.
- Phelan (2008) Deciding to relax external controls. *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, 21(1), p. 38-41



Flotsam or Jetsam: Claiming the wreckage

John Digney and Maxwell Smart

*Under this window in stormy weather I marry this man and woman together;
let none but him who rules the thunder put this man and woman asunder.*

Jonathan Swift, Irish satirist, essayist, political pamphleteer, poet and cleric

*He is the best sailor who can steer within fewest points of the wind,
and exact a motive power out of the greatest obstacles.*

Sir Walter Scott, Scottish novelist, playwright and poet

In the early 1950s Fritz Redl and David Wineman spoke of the complexity of the task of working with troubled youth and that how so very often traditional approaches would fail this cohort of needy youth. They called for the creation of a new profession, 'It seems that there is no way out of this dilemma but the invention of a new design, which offers us opportunities of strategy in a different dimension that either good education or thorough psychiatric treatment in themselves seem to grant'.

A profession that could draw from many places, construct bridges, make new connections and work on a very different level was needed. The required response would need to draw from the knowledge of many different disciplines, such as psychology, education, medicine, social work

and the like, This would be a complex task, 'there is no simple way out, and even such a design will deal with innumerable hurdles and will have to find compromises between alternatives so far apart that they seem hard to bridge' (Redl & Wineman, 1951 p.284). Well for over 60 years we have been begging, stealing and borrowing (in addition to developing our own body of expertise and knowledge), but who would have thought we would ever look to the maritime or nautical professions for inspiration or explanation. Yet here we are!

Understanding the 'wreckage'

In our work we often hear kids being spoken of as being damaged or discarded; or of having survived the turmoil of

wrecked homes and distressed environments. Then we sometimes hear people refer to kids who are 'salvageable' and those that are 'beyond saving'. This is a very offensive and judgemental way to frame our kids, but how often do we think this way ourselves? Only a short number of years ago we (both authors) might have been heard to say things such as, 'if only we could have gotten to them earlier we could have saved them'. But now, given the increase in knowledge available (especially that which is transmitted via the relational schools of thought and disciplines such as neuro-research) we need to ask, is it acceptable anymore to think in this way? Perhaps it is more about how we frame our task!

The words 'flotsam' and 'jetsam' are often used in the same sentence, but in truth many who speak these words are not aware of their actual definition nor that they have two other 'siblings' ('lagan' and 'derelict').¹ These are terms that are used mainly by those of a nautical persuasion, and more specifically those interested in maritime salvage. But these are terms that could very easily be applied to many of our kids. For instance, do we see particular kids as 'flotsam' – that which is left

floating when things around them disintegrate, the bits and pieces of drift wood that have managed to float ashore; or are they more like 'jetsam', those who are 'cut loose' and left to fend for themselves as their *guardians* either head to the lifeboats or struggle to thread water?

But these are only two of the different types of 'human wreckage' that we need concern ourselves with, for in addition there are those who have stopped floating and have sunk to the bottom, these are the kids who have lost hope and who are at extreme risk of being lost forever. Over recent years we have made a shift (a positive one) to a place where we are more likely to see the 'sunken kids' as 'lagan' – those that are at the bottom, in fear of drowning, but who can be reclaiming or salvaged. We no longer allow ourselves see any kids as 'derelict' or 'unsalvageable'. In fact, we are of the firm belief that we would be derelict in our duty to think in such a way – we are in a position of trust, a position where we must never give up and seek to find a way to help these kids get themselves to the surface.

In maritime laws, there are principles in place that provide protections to those working in the salvage business, inherent in

1 *Flotsam* is floating wreckage of a ship or its cargo, *Jetsam* is part of a ship or its cargo that is purposely cast overboard to lighten the load in time of distress and is washed ashore.

Lagan is goods or wreckage that is lying on the bottom of the ocean which can be reclaimed, and *derelict* is cargo that is also on the bottom of the ocean, but which no one has any hope of reclaiming.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flotsam,_jetsam,_lagan,_and_derelict

these principles are statutes which state that a person responsible for the recovery of another's property, which has been lost or discarded at sea, is entitled to a reward to the value of that which is recovered. Imagine how that would translate into the work we do, assisting children, youth and families salvage themselves and their own relationships.

A Fair Comparison

Is it reasonable to suggest that the work we do is in any way comparable to the work of marine salvage workers or is this just hyperbole? Well, of course when we look at some of the most high profile salvage operations over the years we can see that these have significant worth. For instance, the historic value of the salvage retrieved from the Titanic wreckage cannot be under estimated, nor can the financial value of the 2007, Black Swan Project which recovered an estimated \$500 million in silver and gold. And then of course is the humanitarian value of the 2001 operation to salvage the Russian submarine, Kursk, which was raised to recover the bodies of 118 sailors (plus to eliminate the nuclear hazard it posed).

But is it a fair comparison? We are certainly of the opinion that that which is of most value in our world are the lives of our most vulnerable youth, their value far out weights the monetary and historical value that other items may have. Who after all would, if they had in one hand the life of a kid and in the other a €1,000,000,000 artefact chose to drop the kids off a cliff?

Can we 'claim a parity' to salvage in CYC Work

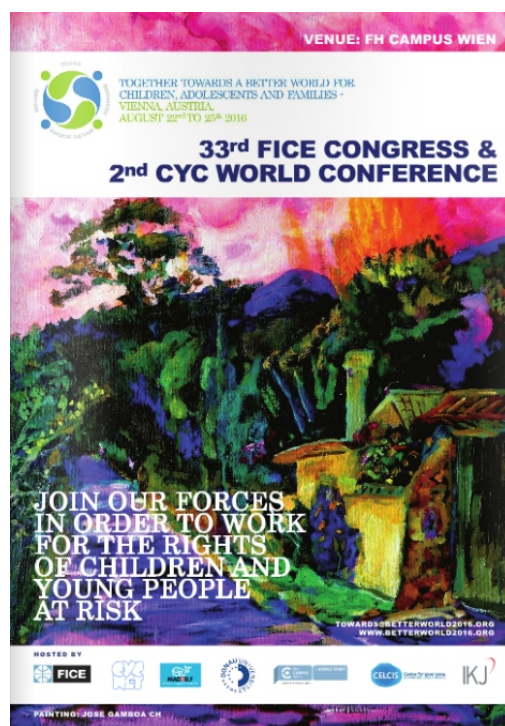
Of course there are rules and laws, principles and guidelines in all professions which usually stem from common sense and common law. In maritime salvage circles, the accepted laws (based in common law) whilst not fully universal, do share similar conditions and criteria throughout the Globe, which must be met before one can claim any reward.

Maritime law in general, considers the article under consideration must be 'in peril', secondly the person providing the salvage service (the 'salvors') must be acting voluntarily and thirdly, they must be successful in their efforts. So if considered in the same way how would the work of Child and Youth Care measure up in meeting the three requirements?

- Who would question that most of the children, youth and families that we work with are in peril (or at risk) - this is after all why they become engaged with the services and support that we offer. For some, if young people have not already struck a metaphorical rock and begun to sink (or have been taken out to sea and scuttled), they are usual in choppy waters and ready to capsize. For even more vulnerable youth, they are nearly at the bottom of the ocean and struggling to survive, almost resigned to their fate and allowing themselves sink or so deeply submerged that most see them as unreachable. (Box 1, check!)

- Are we acting in a voluntary capacity to support the reclaiming of these potentially lost souls? Some will say that we are (most of us) being paid to do a job and therefore cannot claim a voluntary status. However, even those working on salvage boats are paid a wage – The key is that they are not directly paid by those who own that which is being salvaged. So, it could legitimately be debated that this argument does not hold as much water as it would first appear (pardon the pun). Certainly, we make a career decision to learn how to be a support to those who are struggling or who have lost their way, we do this at our own expense and in our own time and are certainly not on the pay roll of our kids or their families. Remember also, Kruger (1983) stated, ‘care givers are, in general, positively motivated young adults looking for a meaningful way to work with children ... salaries are not commensurate with the role or potential, workloads are heavy and supervision and training are minimal’ (p.34). It could be argued that those working in child and youth care services in effect are almost pseudo volunteers who ‘sign up’ to become de facto ‘salvors’. (Box 2, check!).
- But are we successful in our efforts? Well, this is certainly open to subjective interpretation - after all, how do we measure success in our work? A good friend and colleague (a psychologist) once said to us, ‘if we can even just keep some kids alive until they can take care of themselves, then we have done

a good job’. Of course many will disagree with this, saying we are only successful when kids have graduated from Harvard with a First Class Degree in Law. ‘Why is it that when we have a *not so good* outcome that we are told we don’t know what we are doing but when a kid does really well we are informed – sure, they didn’t really need your intervention anyway’. This was said to one of the author some years ago by the manager of a specialist residential programme. The response given (a quote from Harry Truman) was, ‘hey, it’s amazing what you can achieve when you don’t mind who gets the credit’. Whist the Honours Degree outcome may be an aspiration, we know what



the small successes are and we clearly see when we are being of help to our kids and their families ... small successes over time are the foundations to greater successes. Family reunification, attendance at school, a commitment to extended care and linking with after-care services, desistance from offending and staying out of prison (or homeless services); may alter the life trajectories of youth whom were previously sinking. We know when our interventions have been successful and we also know we will never be acknowledged for it.

The 'pay off'

Having set out our stall and argued for comparison and a right for compensation, we could now like to make it clear what we want in return for the salvage work that we do. On behalf of all child and youth care (and associated professions) we are making several demands:

1. We want a helicopter brought to the top of the building (we will give the pilot instructions of where he is to take us when we are onboard).
2. We want \$1,000,000 each (in used, non-sequential notes).
3. We want those that are looking on at us as we go about our work to, please:
 - try to understand what we are trying to do,
 - give consideration to the journey most of these kids have travelled,
 - stop being judgemental (at least until you have all the facts),

- think about how you can also be of help,
 - stop throwing stones and insults and,
 - come to understand that we are here in a voluntary (even if paid) capacity,
4. We want the kids and families to know that we are on their side and that we understand their pain.
 5. We want a better connection between all who work for the benefit of children, youth and families.

Most off all, we want kids to stop feeling 'hopeless' and 'useless'. A phrase attributed to both Floyd Staff and Father Edward Flannigan over 100 years ago states, 'there is no such thing as a bad child'.

Ok, maybe we are prepared to give away demands number '1' and '2' – but the others are not up for negotiation.

Maxie & Digs

References

- Keogh, D (N.D) retrieved on 13th August 2015 from <http://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/theres-no-such-thing-as-a-bad-boy>
- Kruger, M. (1983) *Carless to Caring for Troubled Youth*. Tall Publishing: Wauwatosa.
- Redl, F. & Wineman, D. (1951) *Children who Hate*. Collier – Macmillan: New York.

Over the past year or so I have been writing a series of columns attempting to think about CYC in relation to the emerging set of relations of domination and liberation that constitute our historical moment as we enter the 21st century. I have argued that, we as a field, are still profoundly rooted in conceptual frameworks and beliefs about what we do that are both outdated and non-responsive to the lived reality of young people today. Indeed, we might well say that CYC runs the risk of indulging itself in nostalgia for a world that is passing and resentment over the loss of that world.

From my perspective, to approach our work in any way that implies that the past can be recovered and reinstated through our engagement with young people is a failure to understand, that while history may repeat certain patterns it does not recuperate the past. The 20th century and the social forms that emerged during the lifetime of most of those practicing in our field were not particularly successful, nor admirable. The last half of that century was an acceleration of savage brutality, rapacious social practices, failed revolutions, environmental disaster, and social dissolution. Whatever we yearn for in our memories of those days (happy and intact families, respectful young people, authen-

ticity, morality, functional government and so on) only existed in fragmented and partial forms for a very limited number of people living at the expense of the rest of humanity and other species. That is not to say that the movements of the 20th century towards justice, equity and liberation were not heroic and worthwhile. Their very existence is a tribute to the

living force of creativity and revolt against domination. But, at the end of the day it is time to admit that they failed and even their most glorious achievements have been appropriated and eviscerated by the overwhelming success of global capitalism.

However, Antonio Negri reminds us that the revolutions with the most force are those that failed, because they have so much that didn't get ac-

tualized. In this regard, there is a whole realm of incomplete projects from the 20th century awaiting deployment in revolts to come. However, such virtual revolutionary possibility cannot be founded on the same terrain from which it originated. The elements of unfinished revolutionary projects must be reconfigured within the conditions of the current historical moment. That is why nostalgia and resentment are such deplorable and problematic inclinations.

As anyone who had followed my col-

CYC in the 21st Century: A Radical Proposition

Hans Skott-Myhre

Brock University

hskottmy@brocku.ca



umns knows that I would propose, “care” as a revolutionary concept. The idea that “care” might drive our social policies, practices and relations is a truly radical idea. In this, there is no more politically charged relation than that of caring for our children. I would argue that the model for how we care for all others is founded in how we care for our young. To the degree that we are deluded about the actual practices of caring for our offspring, that peculiar madness will infect all other social relations. In this, there is a genetic autopeosis of social relations, in which practices of caring re-produce themselves across generations as the foundation for all else that follows.

I have argued, in this column, that as we enter the 21st century our beliefs about “caring” are fully delusional. That CYC, in general, is operating as a system of caring as simulacra. That what we do is not caring per se, but a copy of a copy of actual caring. It is a weak approximation developed in collusion with the dominant forces of global capitalism that hold no regard for the well being of our young. Our caring is a compromise designed to shield us from the punitive responses of those who control the very limited resources we rely on to continue to practice as institutions and agencies of “care.” Of course, I would argue that even this compromise is failing, as institutions of care are being de-funded, downsized, appropriated and de-potentiated across the planet.

The question then is what to do? As I have noted, there is no point in looking to the past. We need models that fully engage

the coming world, not the world that is over and gone. The becoming world of global capitalism is an increasingly grim place for all living things, with species extinctions at an all time high and concomitant social ecologies similarly under threat. We need radical proposals that open unknown and strange territories and take into account the actualities of technology, ecology and social relations. One such proposal is made by Donna Haraway in her very provocative thought experiment she calls “A Curious Practice.”

Haraway’s piece is set in a future in which there has been massive destruction of the world’s eco-systems requiring a re-configuring of social structures. Her thought experiment, (which she carried out with Vinciane Despret and Fabrizio Terranova, as part of a colloquium held by Isabelle Stengers) required that that she and her co-writers “fabulate a baby, and somehow bring the baby through five human generations.”

I want to stop here before engaging the main premise of the piece. I want to note the conceptual frame here of thinking five generations ahead. This is an echo of the aboriginal principle of thinking seven generations ahead. It was the Iroquois who leave us a records of this principle in The Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy.

Of course, this concept has been culturally appropriated by various movements in the 20th and 21st centuries to their own ends, but the idea of considering any action that we take having implications seven generations into the future has immense implications.

Imagine if we as CYC workers considered any interaction that we might have with young people as having broad eco-systemic implications for generations to come. What if we were to ask ourselves, in our debriefings and planning meetings, to be accountable to the next five to seven generations of young persons and their relatives and friends. Imagine if we went further and asked ourselves about the ecological impact of our relationships with young people.

When we assist them in getting a job, what is the implication of the type of work we are facilitating for the survivability of our co-species on the planet? What accountability do we have if that job involves young people in practices that negatively influence the survival of other living things, including human beings, over the next 150 years? What about the impact of the physical plants where we do the work? What is the impact of our energy use, the way the buildings interact with the surrounding environment? What about the way that our buildings shed water onto asphalt walkways and parking lots contaminating water supplies and squandering an increasingly contentious resource? What about the food we feed the young people in our care? Where does it come from and how is it produced? Do we think about these things? If we care about our young, why would we be so careless in thinking through such impacts on their emerging world?

For Harraway's thought experiment, she begins with a world that has been carelessly cared for. She fabulates a baby

named Camille and tells us that "Camille is the keeper of memories in the flesh of a world that may become habitable again." There is much to be said about this short bit of text. The idea that our young are the keepers of memory, but not the memory of our individual consciousness is quite evocative. The memory she is referring to here is the corporeal memory of the body. It is the way that our actions and their consequences shape the physicality of ourselves, and the world that we engage. This memory cannot be forgotten or denied. It is the implacable record of physical evolution. It is a geo-genetic record of who are becoming. Harraway is suggesting that if her future world is to become fully habitable again (and perhaps even today it is not fully habitable) then it will be done at the level of the body in interaction with other bodies. It cannot be done at the level of abstraction or through the codes of language or the money form.

Harraway refers to Camille as one of the "Children of the Compost who ripen in the earth to say no to the posthuman of every time." The Children of the compost are a small community of several hundred people who "felt moved to migrate to ruined places and work with human and non-human partners to heal those places, building networks, nodes and webs of and for a newly habitable world."

I would argue that this is truly relevant to a possible becoming Child and Youth Care. Such a CYC movement would be a truly progressive and positive application of Child and Youth Care in its most fundamental aspects as a configuration of care



inclusive of both adults and young people. Imagine if we reconfigured our programs and agencies so that they became living communities that would seek out ruined places (inner cities, ecologically devastated landscapes, economically eviscerated small towns and so on) and took on, as the joint project of the young people and adults involved in “care,” the healing of such places. That might be project worthy of the name Child and Youth Care.

As might be expected such a community would call for new modes of subjectivity and a reconfiguration of social form. In Harraway’s thought experiment, she envisions a number of what might seem radical moves. First every new child must have at least three parents “who may or may not practice new or old genders.” Differences in bodily configurations along with their histories of struggle and contestation are to be valued and beloved. The primary relation in the community is that of kin rather than the old restrictive configurations of the Euro-American family. “Kin relations can be formed at any time in life, and so parents and other sorts of relations can be added or invented at many significant points.” While this may seem radical at first, it is actually how most Child and Youth Care practice proceeds. Young people involved in our sphere form a web of shifting affiliations and alliances over the time we know them. The difference is, that we consider such practice an unfortunate necessity, while Harraway is valorizing it as a richer web of productive relations for any child born into it.

This web is extended into the relations

the community has with other species. Along with releasing the bonds of binary sexuality, parenting as ownership and taxonomically derived kinship networks, Harraway calls for centering kinship rather than reproduction as a means of reducing human impact on other species and the eco-systems in which humans are imbedded. Rather than creating a social system premised on the ability to reproduce as its driving impetus, the Children of the Compost take the development of kinship as the primary function of their small society. In this, because children are rare and the decision to bring a child into the community is a collective decision brought about in collaboration with individual reproductive freedom, children are highly valued. It is taken as a central value that such children should have a rich kinship network of both humans and animals. In this regard each child is given an animal symbiont who is a member of a threatened species.

The original use of the term symbiosis was used in reference to people living together. Over the years it has come to mean unlike organisms living together over an extended period of time. Harraway goes a step further and suggests the possibility of using genetic body mutations to share characteristics between the child and their symbiont. This suggestion implies taking the genetic science currently controlled by multinational corporations, such as Monsanto, to control the world’s food supply, and making such science available for building closer webs and networks of kinship between humans and species under threat of extinction.

While it is unlikely that CYC is going to get into the practices of genetic modification anytime in the near future (although our complicity in neuroleptic drugs borders on such practices), the concept of beginning to experiment with a symbiotic relationship with threatened species in the vicinities of our programs is not too far fetched. Indeed, the work being done with young children by Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw at the University of Victoria Child and Youth Care Department moves us in this direction. To build relations of care with other species as part of our work together with young people has a number of very interesting implications for developing functioning networks of care that involve young people and adults collaborating together on common projects that have implications for generations beyond themselves.

I am not suggesting that we take on Harraway's thought experiment as a blue print for our work. I am suggesting that radical proposals that clear the landscape of our current social configurations and challenge our outdated and dangerously destructive common sense notion of our relationship to the world, are evocative and indeed necessary. They are necessary, because without them we will very probably continue on an entirely unsustainable path of narcissistic driven self destruction. It is more than time for a change in our thinking and our practices. We need evocative radical proposals for a new world to come and CYC is one of the places where those ideas and practices could arise.

Always wanted to get your writing published but didn't know where to start, or who to go to?

We're here to help.



info@cycnetpress.cyc-net.org

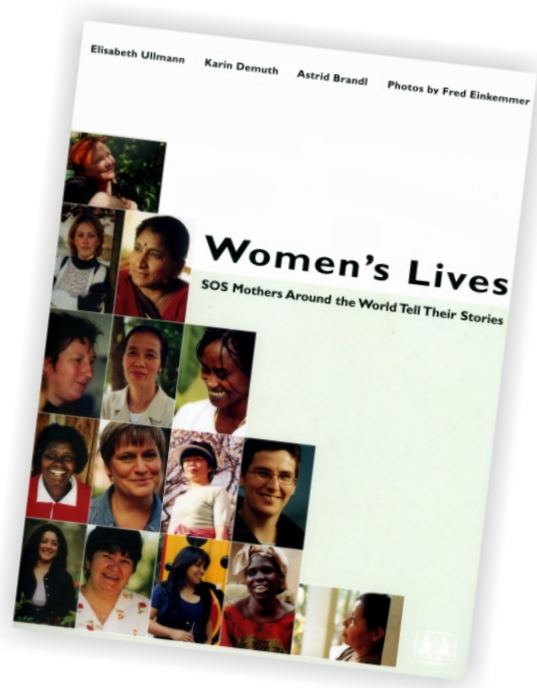
VISIT OUR BOOK STORE AT
<http://cycnetpress.cyc-net.org>
 ALL PROFITS GO DIRECTLY TO



Women's Lives

SOS Mothers tell their stories

Part 2



Subhashini
Aadinarayanamurthi

Born 11.10.1963, India

“My sister looked after my daughter whilst I was at work. One day my daughter came down with terrible sickness and diarrhoea. She was just about six years old at the time. It was the 21st of May 1992 and India’s prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, had just been assassinated. There were a lot of problems in India.”

Because of the unrest, Subhashini only manages to bring her only child to a hospital after all chances of helping her are gone. She has already left her husband, who is neither interested in her, as a person, nor in the child. Her parents support her decision and take her and her daughter in again. She teaches at a school, so that at least she can be financially independent. Then her child dies.

Subhashini hears about SOS Children's Villages in a newspaper advertisement. She has her doubts whether there could really be an organisation as described in the text, but with her brother's permission she applies anyway. She is invited for an interview one year later and then sent for training. So that she can take part in the practical training in the north of India, she and her other colleagues have to learn Hindi. The efforts pay off, because during her training Subhashini realises that this is the way she wants to go.

The Story of Her Life

"So I lost interest in this marriage, because you don't get married for the physical pleasures only."

My name is Subhashini. I have one older sister and two brothers. I was born in Adra, in West Bengal. Five years later, my parents moved here to Visakhapatnam for of our education. I completed primary and secondary school and then started at university. However, I didn't complete my degree, because I got married a year later. My family wasn't rich. My father worked as a postman. Despite that, he managed to bring us up and to build the house they still live in. He provided for our education and managed to save enough money for my dowry, with no financial assistance from our relatives. My older brother works in a bank now. My other brother is unemployed at the moment and my sister lives with my parents. She isn't married. She's deaf.

I got married on the 8th of March 1985. My parents had taken a close look at the man who was going to marry me. He had a good job in a small bank in the nearby province of Orissa. He was very nice, but he had a psychological problem in that he wanted to have sexual intercourse all the time. I suffered him pressurising me every day after work for a whole year. I also had a baby by him. It was a little girl. Her name was Nirupama. When she was six months old, I realised that she was not entirely well. The doctor gave me tablets that I had to give her twice a day. However, the child lost consciousness and seemed not to be of this world anymore. I took her to various hospitals, but her condition didn't improve.

My grandmother lived in Cuttack and there were religious men here. People said that these men could heal various illnesses. So I took the child there to pray. One of the religious men told me that my daughter was being plagued by ghosts that lived in the house she'd been born in. A little boy had died in that house. We returned home and my father asked some holy men to come and get rid of the ghosts by praying and making sacrifices. The child still didn't improve, though. Through all this, my husband wasn't with us. He only visited us once and that wasn't to see how his daughter was, but only to have sex with me.

My husband didn't really want us to go back home. The only thing he was interested in was my body. So I lost faith in this marriage, because you don't get married for the physical pleasures only. I was very



disappointed and my first priority became, saving my child. I wanted to stay with my parents and take on little jobs, so that I wouldn't be a burden to them. However, my parents were afraid of what people would say and they explained that they would help me, if I continued to have problems, but that in the meantime I should return to my husband and take up my familial duties once more. So then I took my daughter and returned.

I had only been home for a few days when the problem started again. However, I decided to stay with him for a further six months. My father came about every two weeks to make sure that everything was in order. When he found out what was happening, he burst into tears and brought me home. I didn't want to be dependent on my parents and so we asked a relative, who was the headmaster of a school, for a job. He had a small piece of land, pitched a small tent on it and gave me ten children from different classes. He told me, "Look after these children." The school expanded from ten to seventy pupils and he employed another teacher. I taught in this school for two years. My sister looked after my daughter whilst I was at work. One day my daughter came down with terrible sickness and diarrhoea. She was just about six years old at the time. It was the 21st of May 1992 and India's prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, had just been assassinated. There were a lot of problems in India. It was, therefore, impossible to get to a hospital, because people were rioting on the busses. As soon as the situation had calmed down again, we got to a hospi-

tal as quickly as possible, but the child died on the way there. I was so, so sad, because now I had nothing. My daughter was the only person I had to look after.

Could you tell us something about your grandparents?

My mother's parents lived in the province of Andhra Pradesh and they had five children. I don't know much about them, because they died whilst my mother was expecting me. My mother's father's sister's son is my father. That means that my mother is married to her cousin. Despite that, my grandmother made my mother's life hard, even though she was her aunt! My grandfather didn't have an easy time. He was an honest postman, but other people took money from him. My grandparents sold their earrings and gold, but it wasn't enough to pay off the debts. Nobody else helped my grandfather and so he had to go to prison for three months. My mother is still sad now that her father, who was an honest man, had to go through something like that.

There were four brothers on my father's side. He was the eldest son. My grandfather was the headmaster of a school and also gave private lessons at home. My father's parents got on well together and even when they were old, they still looked like a young couple in love. They listened to each other. My grandmother died one year after I was born. When my grandfather retired, my father brought him to live with us. We lived in the railway quarter at the time. So that he wouldn't be idle, he started working as a

bookkeeper in a college. He used to leave for work at the same time as we left for school. Every morning he would say to us, "By the time you've waited for the bus, you'd be half way there!" So, he marched ahead quickly and we children had to run after him, our schoolbags in one hand and our lunch packets in the other! My grandfather always did his housework himself. He washed the floors, cleaned his room and did his own washing. We have taken these habits of his on and do all our housework ourselves too.

Could you describe your mother in a little more detail for us?

My mother worked hard. Up until now, she has never had any help in the household. Our relatives call her Mudu. She was given this name by her grandfather and it means as much as, "lovable person". She is a jolly person and always has a smile on her lips. Inside, though, she's troubled about my deaf sister and my unemployed brother.

My mother also used to sew uniforms for the railway staff, in addition to doing all the housework. She could make between thirty and fifty uniforms in a fortnight. The pay wasn't particularly good, but she was proud of what she did and said, "I earned this money myself." She would spend it on things for the children.

Have you inherited anything special from your mother?

I have learned a lot about cooking from her and I'm always eager to learn new things. If I see something, I want to know



Subhashini with her parents, her brother and sister and her youngest child.

how it works and want to be able to do things the way my mother does. We laugh a lot together. I think I have inherited this sense of humour, my laughter and my cheerfulness from my mother.

Are there any other women, apart from your mother, who have had a particular influence on you?

I have a special relationship with the daughter of my father's youngest brother. We more or less grew up together. We always said that it wouldn't be good enough for our husbands to earn the money and

for us to be totally dependent on them. We wanted to continue with our studies. We also said that, if it were necessary, we would find jobs a long way from home. One day, her father left the family for another woman. Her mother didn't want to go to work and so she, being the eldest daughter, had to leave school and look for work. She had three brothers and sisters, and I admire her for taking on that responsibility.

Is there a person with whom you can share personal things?

I have my neighbour, Subbhalakshmi here in the SOS Children's Village. My other friend, Vasanthalakshmi, lives outside the village. These two women know each other, and so the three of us have become close friends and we trust each other.

If you think about the term "family", who do you feel belongs to a family?

The mother, the father, the brothers, the sisters, the grandparents, aunts and uncles from both sides. Those are all close relatives. If you're married, then your husband and children also belong to this family. Here we have our SOS family.

What are your particular strengths and talents?

I think the fact that I can always laugh is a talent. Another of my strengths is that I'm committed to my children and spend a lot of time on their education, because I would like them to do well in life. I can motivate them to study. It gives me strength when I see that the children are

doing well at school. I'm also not hurtful to other people. If somebody shouts at me, I try to answer in a friendly manner and to clear up the misunderstanding.

Motivation for Her Choice of Profession

"I'll live there, even if it's only a hut. I want to get away from home and learn something new."

I read the advertisement in the newspaper and, together with my brother, I decided to apply. We didn't say anything to our parents. The tasks of an SOS mother were clearly explained in the advertisement and I thought, "Can there really be an organisation that looks after children like this?" The advert also said that the children would call me mother, and that was something very special. I was sure that after the death of my daughter, nobody would ever call me mother again. I knew that I would be able to share a lot of love with these children, and they would love me in return. Those were the feelings I had when I applied.

It was almost a year later when I was invited for an interview. I had long forgotten the application and was very excited when the reply came. I showed the letter to my mother that evening and she talked to my father about it. He thought I should at least give it a try. And so I travelled to Hyderabad with my father for the interview. When we arrived there, there were so many candidates, that I doubted I would even get to have an interview! But in the



end it was Mr Mitra, who was the head of the SOS Mother and Staff Training Centre in Faridabad at the time, Dr Sunita Kaul, who is in charge of the centre now, and a third person, who eventually interviewed me. I was asked why I would like to work for SOS Children's Villages. I replied that I didn't know very much about SOS Children's Villages, except that they looked after children and that I would like to do that. I told them that I loved children and would give my best. Then they said, "We will send you on a three-month theoretical course. You will have to learn Hindi and everything else. After that, you will be sent to a village." When they mentioned the village, I wasn't quite sure what they were talking about. I didn't know about the many houses and facilities, because the way I imagined a village to be was with

huts. I said to myself, "OK, that's not important. I'll live there, even if it's only a hut. I want to get away from home and learn something new."

I received a letter two weeks later, telling me that I was to take part in the training in Delhi and should bring my divorce documents with me. So, I arrived at the training centre in Faridabad on the 4th of February 1994 and was greeted, along with seventeen other candidates, by Dr Sunita Kaul. Studying at the "Mothers' School" reminded me of being at university. We had a daily routine in the mornings: get dressed, eat breakfast, say prayers and then off to the classroom. Dr Kaul told us that we would have to learn Hindi, because we were to do our practical training in different parts of northern India, where Telugu, my mother-tongue,

would be no use to us. So I started to learn to read and write Hindi and one month later I first tried to speak it.

I did my first practical training together with eight colleagues in Bhimtal. All the trainees who could speak good Hindi were put in family houses on their own. Those of us who couldn't speak such good Hindi went into the family houses in pairs. The experiences I had in Bhimtal were totally new to me. It was the first time I had spent time with children. I cooked for them, gave them their meals and played with them. I was in Anita Johari's family house with another trainee, Adharsh. I was nervous at first, but the SOS mother showed me everything, as if she were my older sister. We spent the first day just watching the SOS mother and then discussed everything afterwards. Because I didn't know how they cooked in the north, I suggested to Adharsh that she take over the cooking and I would do the other things like washing the clothes and preparing the vegetables. The SOS mothers left the village after ten days to attend a refresher course and the children were left in our care.

Sunita had told us that we should keep our valuables in a safe place. I had about two hundred rupees that I had hidden in the bottom of my bag. One evening, a dinner had been organised in the village for the community, and we all attended. When I went back to change my sari, my money had disappeared. I told Adharsh and we decided not to say anything. The next day, I was grinding spices when a little boy, he must have been about eight years old, fell at my feet and told me that he had taken

the money from my bag and was very sorry. His SOS mother wanted to know what was going on between us. I said, "Nothing." Then she asked the boy. He began to cry and told her that he had taken the money. That made the SOS mother cry too. She hugged me and almost knelt in front of me to beg for forgiveness. I had never seen anything like that in my life. She was so upset about the boy's mistake! That was when I first realised how much an SOS mother is responsible for her children's behaviour. I suddenly understood that I wouldn't just be there to cook and clean for the children, but would also be responsible for how they behaved.

I did my next practical in Jaipur. There was a water-shortage in this area at the time. In Bhimtal we only had to turn the taps and we had hot and cold water. Here we had to get up at three in the morning to go and fetch water. I looked after the house and the children and they helped me. It was a lovely time. After that, I spent forty days in Varanasi. All three villages where I did my practical training were very different. In Bhimtal the SOS mothers sang religious songs together in the evenings. It was a period of fasting when I was in Varanasi. The SOS mothers went to the temple together and fasted. I decided that from then on I would also do these things when I had my own home. During the training I realised that this was the right thing for me to do. A lot of the trainees gave up, but I was sure of myself.

My colleague, Mangamma, and I were sent to SOS Children's Village Madras in

December 1994. We spent three years working as SOS aunts there, until Andhra Pradesh was hit by a cyclone and terrible floods on the 6th of November 1997. The trainees, who had been foreseen for the new SOS Children's Village in Andhra Pradesh, were immediately called to Vishakapatnam. That's how we came here, and we were very happy about it.

How did your family and friends react to your choice of profession?

My mother was sad that I went away. It's one thing if a daughter leaves home to get married, but quite another if she goes away to work. I did write to my parents regularly. My mother and father came to Faridabad once to visit me and see how I was. They arrived just as a lot of things were going on. We were working together, chatting and laughing. My mother was relieved. She said, "My daughter has forgotten all her past troubles and her spirit can be happy once more." She still thinks that today. She was over the moon when I was sent to Vishakapatnam, because it meant that we could see one another frequently. My friend is also happy that I have become an SOS mother. She visits me here and would like to become an SOS mother herself, but she has a family of her own.

Experiences as an SOS Mother

"He ran through the village, announcing that we had two babies in the village!"

Mangamma and I were the first two to

come to Vishakapatnam, and then four other SOS mothers followed. We lived in a house in the town with six children to begin with. As time passed, more children arrived. When there were sixty-four children in the house, they were assigned to the SOS mothers. I can remember the feeling I had when the children's names were being read from the list. They were going to be my family! All the SOS mothers were very happy. Then we sat down and helped the children with their learning. The children inched slowly closer and touched their SOS mothers. We took them to the market and went to the cinema together. We lived there for eighteen months. Finally, on the 18th of May 1998, we were able to move into the new SOS Children's Village. It was our village; they were our gardens and our homes.

Where did the children come from?

Most of the children came from the area that had been worst-struck by the flooding. Most of them were from inland villages that can only be reached by boat. The cyclone claimed tens of thousands of human lives and hundreds of thousands of oxen. Our co-workers went there to see if there were any children needing help. One of my daughters is called Madhuri. She was eleven years old when she lost her parents and some of her brothers and sisters. She came here with one of her brothers. She had only done four years of schooling, but when she came here, she started to go to school again.



How many children did you have in the house in town? Did you bring them all to the village with you?

I had twelve children and they all came with me. Later, however, we found out that some of them still had a mother or a father and they went back to their parents. I was sad for them that their lives changed so radically after they returned. Some of them were very talented. Either they were good at school or they were good dancers. One of my boys even won a prize for being the best pupil in the school out of seven hundred and forty children. Then he returned home and I heard that he didn't attend school anymore. I try not to think about these things too much, but I feel sorry that these young people's lives have been totally spoiled, because their parents can't do very much for them.

Have you, as a person, changed in the years since you've been an SOS mother?

I have learned a lot since I've been with SOS Children's Villages. I hadn't learned these things before, because I'd never had the opportunity. There's still much to learn. I never thought that one day I'd earn what I'm earning today. I never had any insurances or savings in the bank before, but now I'm saving for my children. They're insured and I've bought gold for them. Now I think twice before buying something for myself, because I have my children to think of.

Which experiences do you remember most from your first few months in the SOS Children's Village?

There were only three rooms for six SOS mothers in the house in the town. Two mothers and their children were accommodated in each room. We only had two toilets for seventy-five people. When we moved here, we had two toilets for just twelve people! We had separate rooms, cupboards and all sorts of things. The children had great fun opening all the doors to see just how much room we had. They still feel that this is "our house" and they're happy. That's heaven for me.

We had a traditional moving-in celebration, just like any other family. We brought a cow and a calf into the new house, we lit a fire and the oldest person in the house put rice in the milk. We never thought that anything like this would happen in an SOS Children's Village, but we did all these things. The relatives of the six SOS mothers were here and we all had lunch together. That was a very happy moment for us all.

My youngest daughter, Sindhuja, was a baby when she came to us. She was wrapped in a cloth and was very small. There were only two babies in the village to begin with. The village director was happier about them than the SOS mothers. He ran through the village, announcing that we had two babies! All the SOS mothers and the children stood by the entrance. I'll never forget that experience and all that joy. I was given the baby and I took her home with me. She already looked better after a week, because I gave

her a good massage everyday. She was born prematurely and so she needed longer for everything, but now she's well.

How would you describe your working-relationship with the other SOS mothers?

If we're sad, we talk about our worries and problems, but we also share our joys. We meet in one of the family houses once a month, mainly at full moon, and have either lunch or dinner together. We started this when we used to play touch-ball together regularly. After the game, we'd all go to one of the family houses and sit together over a cup of tea. Now it has become a ritual that we don't want to give up.

And what is your working-relationship with the village director like?

He's only the village director when's he's sitting in his office in his director's chair. The rest of the time we see him more as a sort of older brother. He motivates and supports us in our work. If we have a problem with the children and we go to him all hot and bothered, he talks to us about it, and by the time we go home, we've calmed down again. If he's out of the village for any reason, we miss him. Even the children notice it and then they keep asking where he is and when's he coming back again. When he returns, he goes straight to the children who have been asking for him, hugs them and talks to them. I've never seen anything like that in any of the other villages. The older children love him too. If they have an examination coming up, he comes to the

house the day before, gives them a pen as a present and also gives them his blessing.

We spend at least half an hour a day sitting together after evening prayers. Every two months we have a formal meeting. We also have fun together and get on well with him and his wife. We can just go into her house, if we want to. She says that it's our house too. We have a cup of tea or coffee together and we can ask her anything we like.

Thinking about our readers, how would you describe your work?

I would say that the SOS mother is the soul of the SOS Children's Village. She cares for between nine and twelve children, lives together with them in their own house, and she decides herself, what to plant in the garden. She cooks for the children, buys clothes and gets them ready for school, just like any other mother or father would. Other families have a father, but here the children have an uncle, the village director, who takes on this role. He's responsible for their education and, amongst other things, he tries to find work for them. Other male co-workers also take on a fatherly role.

Sometimes people from outside come to visit. Some of them would love to stay here to see how we, as single women, cope with looking after ten children, feeding them and doing all the housework.

A question about the training of SOS mothers: what subject do you think helped you the most?

Three times a week we had "child de-



velopment” and I liked that very much. Sunita explained to us how to treat slow and hyperactive children. I have one daughter who studies a lot, but can’t remember much. She is interested in music and handicrafts, though. During the training I learned that you shouldn’t always tell slow children off, but should rather try to find out what other qualities they have. I try to do that with this girl. The intelligent children find a lot of things easy and get on well, but the other children need a lot more support. We have had one ten-day refresher course since we did our original training. We would like to have a refresher course every two years, though.

How much contact do you have with the community surrounding the SOS Children’s Village?

As far as the community is concerned, the only contact I really have is when I occasionally go to the bank or go to the market shopping. We take part in the prayer gatherings during religious festivals, and I visit the schools once a month to talk to the teachers. Naturally, I visit my family and they visit me too.

What have been your best experiences and what have been the hardest since you’ve been working in the SOS Children’s Village?

I was very happy this year, because four of my children won prizes: my daughter, Sindhuja, won a prize in a competition about the health of babies. Satish and Madhuri came second in the dance competition out of twenty-two pairs, and

Kamalakar won a prize for studying. If all my children were so successful, that would be wonderful.

I worried a lot about one of my sons. He was supposed to go to extra lessons, but never turned up. I didn’t know anything about it, but the village director found out. I felt terrible when he told me. Why do they behave like that, after everything we do for them? These children have so many opportunities and they still do things like that.

Was that harder for you than the reunification of the children we talked about this morning?

Those children, who no longer live with me, have their own parents who are now responsible for them. But this was about my son who lives in my house. That’s why I have to worry about his future and show him how to behave. I will not tell him off, because he’s my child, but I have to show him the way to be successful. The village director insists that we stand behind the children in all that they do.

If you compare your working situation with that of a single mother, where do, in your opinion, the main differences lie?

I experienced the differences with my friend. When her father died, the family returned to her mother’s parents. They had a lot of problems with their mother’s brother. When the children wanted to study, he’d turn off the electricity and he wouldn’t give her any money for the school fees. Being a single mother in the

SOS Children's Village is quite different. If a girl or a boy here wants to study, the organisation supports that, in order to ensure the child a secure life. The SOS mothers also receive a lot of support.

What do you wish for your future?

I would like to be sure that all my children have jobs and are earning money before I retire. I would like to have my own room somewhere where my children can come and visit me. But perhaps they will go their ways without looking back. I think both could happen. I've seen it in other villages. I would also like to learn English. I can read and write English, but in future, I would like to be able to speak it too.

The Children in Her Care

"I'd like my sons and my daughters to have a solid basis in life before they marry."

In comparison to the other SOS Children's Villages, we started a bit differently, because we were an SOS Emergency Relief Programme to begin with. When the village was finished, I moved in here with my children and we were happy. From the beginning my aim was to bring all my children so far that they could stand on their own two feet.

Kamalakar was eleven years old when he came to me. I was a bit unsure of how



to deal with such a grown-up boy. By the time they reach that age, they know everything about their family and understand what has happened to them. I always tried to see him more as a friend, and he was open and told me everything that had happened to him. Up to now he's doing well at school even though he's moved from a Telugu school to an English one.

My eldest daughter, Madhuri, also came to me when she was eleven years old. She reached puberty that year and I wanted to have a celebration in the house, because she was my first daughter and that is a special thing. I also invited my parents. My mother brought her a sari and some flowers. I would like her to learn hard, find a job and be able to stand on her own two feet. Then we will start looking for a husband for her.

My other boy, Prakash, is seven. He did well at school in the first two years, but then he got a bit proud and he failed in a few subjects. He likes all subjects except for Telugu, and I asked him if he came from England, because he doesn't want to learn our local language!

Vinodha is thirteen years old. She studies all day, but forgets everything immediately. I worry a lot about this daughter. Perhaps she has some other talents, some children are good at needlework or painting. It's neither possible nor necessary that all children are good at school.

My son, Lokesh, is good at dancing and at school. Preethi Priyanka, another daughter, is in the fourth year. Ram Babu is an average pupil. He's nine. My daughter,

Meena, is seven and in the second year at school. Two of my children, my daughter, Sowjanya and my son, Ravi, are at kindergarten. Ramya is in the first year and best in the class. However, Satish, on the other hand, isn't interested in learning at all, only in sport. My eldest son, Ravi Teja, is seventeen. He's interested in electrical engineering. The village director has told him that he has to stay at school until year ten. Then he can go to a technical college to learn to be a radio mechanic. And then there's the baby, Sindhuja. She was three months old when she came to me. When I first saw her, I was worried, because she was so small. On first impression, she reminded me of my own daughter.

That's fourteen children all together, whereby three are living in the youth home. Two of the children were only with me for three years and another only for a fortnight. It was very hard for me when they left.

What do you know about where your children come from?

After the cyclone, most of the children were living in terrible conditions. We find out about their pasts when they come to us, because either they tell us or we can feel it on a different level. Even a three-year-old can remember where he comes from, talks about his mother and father, and what his father did to his mother. They share this information with us. We don't force them to talk about these things all the time, because it takes them long enough to accept us and let us near them, as it is.

Could you tell us about one or two of your children's life stories?

They don't know what's going on when they're very young. Preethi's mother committed suicide by setting herself alight. Her father remarried and the second wife made Preethi work and didn't allow her to study or let her near her father. She was such a sad child. I didn't want to hurt her any more and so I didn't ask any questions. I just told her that I would be there for her if ever she needed me.

Ravi Teja and Vinodha are brother and sister. When Vinodha was five, her mother died of cancer. Their father really loved the children. When he brought them here, he often came to visit. Over the last couple of years he hasn't come to our house, but he still meets the children.

Are some of the children still in touch with their natural families?

No, not really.

What do you hope for your girls and boys?

I believe that they all have to try to work hard to succeed. I hope for them, that they do well and find a solid basis in life. I don't want them to become unqualified workers or anything else unsuitable for them. We give them so much support and offer our help. Sometimes I wish that they'd try a little harder.

I'd like my sons and my daughters to have a solid basis in life before they marry. If they find a person with whom they'd like to live, I'd neither be against a love marriage nor a caste marriage. I'm sure that

the village director would support that decision too. However, if they want to give us the responsibility, of course I'd try to find a partner for them. They will make me a grandmother, one day we'll be a huge family, and our house will be full of all these people and their children. I will grow old happily.

To My Colleagues Around the World

We should take each child into our hearts, as if they were our own, and help them to live a solid life. If an SOS mother's main motive for doing the work is her salary, then we won't be able to achieve this aim for our children. There are SOS mothers who are older than me, what can I tell them? We love the children in our village, all of them. We should always motivate them, because if a child is not good at one thing, perhaps he or she is better at something else. We should support them to do the things they are good at.

Subhashini on the Situation of Women in India

Many women would like to go to work and earn their own money, like the men do. Some actually do this. But even if a woman has gone to university and has found a job with a good income, the situation invariably changes as soon as she gets married. Usually the husband's family is against her working. Sometimes they are in favour of her working, because it means that she can support the family. If it works, then being married can be a thoroughly



good thing, but in some cases it just does not work.

Generally, women do not have much freedom. A woman cannot even go anywhere by bus, because if a woman is sitting alone on a bus, she will be laughed at and made fun of by the others. There are women who just refuse to comply and manage to do things on their own. However, this is not possible in normal families.

As far as the ability to gain an education is concerned, there is no difference between the sexes, because it is a person's intelligence which is a qualification to learn. However, it is different from one family to the next, as to how far a woman

is considered to be equal and whether she receives the same support as a man. In some families, the opinion is, that it is better for the son to receive the better education, because the daughter will one day get married anyway. On the job market men generally earn more than women, even if the women are doing the same job.

I do not know very much about other countries, but I have heard that women in other countries can have children without being married. Nothing like that would be possible in India. If a woman has an illegitimate child in India, people will think badly of her. I had to bring up my child on my own, because I had problems with my mar-

SOS Children's Village Work in India

Hermann Gmeiner met the then prime minister of India, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, in 1963. Both Nehru and his daughter, Indira Gandhi, were impressed by the SOS Children's Village idea, and so a committee was founded to realise SOS Children's Villages in India. Indira Gandhi was the chairperson. SOS Children's Villages India was registered as a charity on 12 May, 1964. The first SOS Children's Village went into construction in Greenfields in 1967, and the first families were able to move in in 1968. Indira Gandhi presided over the official opening in 1971.

Existing SOS Children's Village Facilities

32 SOS Children's Villages with attached SOS Youth Facilities, numerous SOS Kindergartens, 15 SOS Hermann Gmeiner Schools, 9 SOS Vocational Training Centres, several SOS Social Centres, 8 SOS Medical Centres, 1 SOS Emergency Relief Programme

SOS Children's Village Facilities under construction

4 SOS Children's Villages

riage. My parents gave me their full support. Had that happened to me without being married, my parents would not have let me into their home.

I think that women should receive much more support: from society, from the family and from the workplace. Women should definitely have the chance to be independent and to earn their own money.

From: **WOMEN'S LIVES: SOS MOTHERS AROUND THE WORLD TELL THEIR STORIES**

Elisabeth Ullmann, Karin Demuth and Astrid Brandl. ISBN 3-9500984-3-7

Published by SOS Hermann Gmeiner Academy, Innsbruck – 2nd edition, 2006.

All photos: Fred Einkemmer

INDIA	
Area	3,287,263 km ²
Population	1,015,923,000
Population density	309 per km ²
Average number of children per woman	3.1 *
Life expectancy for women	63.4 *
Life expectancy for men	62.2 *
Infant mortality	6.9%
Illiteracy rate amongst women	45.8%
Illiteracy rate amongst men	24.2%
Percentage of population living below the poverty line	44.2%
Unemployment rate	10.4%
Religions (the two most common)	80.3% Hindus, 11% Muslims
Languages	Hindi, English, 17 equal regional languages
GNP per capita	USD 450

Sources: *Der Fischer Weltalmanach 2003*; * WDI Database





Reunion

Laura Steckley

Last month my column focused on separation and the complex mess of feelings it can provoke. Now, having returned from 'back home' in Colorado, it feels apt to write about reunion. In fact it is obvious to me in retrospect that some of what I named 'separation anxiety' was actually reunion anxiety. My feelings weren't just about leaving, but about how things would be when I arrived.

Having a name for something can often make it more manageable; it increases the likelihood of actively cognitively processing emotions and experiences. You can think of it as mental digestion. Undigested emotions and experiences, ones that remain

unconscious or semi-conscious, will often have a disruptive effect on our thoughts and feelings. So I've been thinking that 'reunion anxiety' is a useful phrase that reminds us what children and young people may experience before seeing their family, and also before returning to our care. It also may give us some direction in making sense, together with a young person, of the parts of her struggle (if there is a struggle) that are about separation, and those that are about reunion. And, our course, it may help to make sense of our own experiences as well.

So after an intensive three weeks of reuniting with my family, I've been thinking

more deeply about why reunions can be difficult. To start, they can be unpredictable. As mentioned last month, I had mild anxiety about how quickly and easily we all would be able to re-establish that feeling of connection again. Unanticipated feelings can arise and people can behave in unexpected ways. For example, when I was little I had trouble understanding why my Grandma, who used to travel from Indiana to Colorado about once a year to visit us, would always cry when we would collect her at the airport. It made sense when she cried upon leaving, but not at the start of the visit. How interesting it was, then, that on my first couple of visits from Scotland to Colorado I too burst out crying upon seeing family in the arrivals lounge. Both times took me completely by surprise.

There can be awkwardness when first reconnecting with another. It can feel vulnerable or like an uncomfortable distance to be bridged. I have found myself resisting eye-contact and asking again, 'So how are you?' only moments after receiving an answer to the same query. The more difficult the history and precarious the relationship, the more challenging that initial reconnection can be. So for some young people in our care, it might make perfect sense why they have such a hard time in the lead up to going home. It's probably easier to miss when things appear to be going well.

Sometimes a great deal of pressure is attached to the reunion. It can be a bit like Christmas – an event that rarely measures up under the weight of expectation.

Home, no matter how difficult it was before a young person came into your care, may now become a receptacle for hopes, projections and fantasies. Magical thinking can emerge that looks something like, 'when I'm home, everything will be alright'. Conversely, young people can have a lot of dread related to going home; this is especially difficult to manage if they also experience their placement as dreadful as well.

And of course, relationships can be difficult or challenging. So when the blush of delight from the initial reconnection fades, old frictions and unresolved issues can re-emerge. I find this particularly difficult because the time together feels precious and fleeting; the last thing I want to do is spend some of it in conflict. I've also noticed that when things are harmonious, I simultaneously experience a bittersweet quality that comes from the knowledge that soon, we will again be apart.

Separations and reunions tell us something about closeness and distance in our relationships. They make demands on our interpersonal boundaries, and Varda Mann-Feder helpfully encourages us to attend to even the smallest comings and goings as opportunities for learning and support (you can access her article here on *CYC-Online*

<http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-1003-you-me-us.html>) Through the much smaller separations from and reunions with you, children and young people can develop an unconscious model that informs the more difficult separations and reunion they experience with others.



It may be helpful to think about the rhythms and rituals that already exist in relation to separating and coming back together, and whether they might be further developed or completely changed. The rhythms for our contact with kids and their contact with their families tend to be adult-centred – staff schedules or rotas tend to be informed by work-week models; family contact tends to be based on school-week or programme considerations. Thinking about all of this reminds me of Rob, a young person I worked with who had a very complicated and distressing relationship with his mother. He saw her twice annually, and for the life of me I couldn't figure out what this was based on. It was far too long between visits for them to build any semblance of a relationship, and at the same time the ordeal for him seemed to come around far too often. Timing wasn't the only problem, but it was clear to us that the rhythm of contact didn't work for Rob.

It is probably much easier to tailor our rituals rather than our rhythms to meet young people's needs related to separations and reunions. This can often develop naturally and may encompass our more nurturing instincts, like how we send a child off to sleep or prepare him for our absence while we're on vacation. When children have difficulty, our temptation may be to downplay their distress ('it's only for a little while') or avoid it altogether – especially when the behaviour pushes our own buttons. Instead, there is an opportunity to create, together, some sort of ritual that reaffirms our investment in the rela-

tionship and helps to contain related anxiety. It doesn't have to be complicated – the use of a nickname or key humorous phrase might be all that is needed to initiate a brief, repeated process that the child finds supportive.

Finally, striving to understand what separations and reunions mean to a young person, and attending to the meaning the two of you are making through the enactment of your own processes of coming together and moving apart, can be of immense help to a young person. This is the case even when the feelings and experiences are too painful to be explored directly. It may be enough for you (individually and as a team) to wonder or hypothesise about what these things mean to the young person. This process of holding in mind will increase the likelihood that you will find responses that make the process more manageable.

So, I hope you all have a good month in practice and in your personal lives! I look forward to 'seeing you' again next time in this strange, largely imagined space.

Reference

Mann-Feder, V. (1999). You/me/us: Thoughts on boundary management in child and youth care. *Journal of Child and Youth Care*, 13(2), 93-98.



What have I been missing?

Twelve years of *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice* have passed since the change from the *Journal of Child and Youth Care* in Volume 16.
 12 VOLUMES, 48 ISSUES! Enquire at rcycp@cvcnetpress.cvc-net.org for back issues or subscriptions. Full details at www.rcycp.com

Relational
Child & Youth
Care
 Practice



ADVOCACY PROJECT

TAKE TWO

An uncomfortable challenge?

Aurora De Monte & Heather Sago

Part One is available in the [July 2013](#) edition of CYC-Online.

It appears that asking about advocacy has become a loaded question. Go ahead, try it and watch people squirm. It appears to create all kinds of non-verbal expressions of discomfort. Why is this the case? When we ask a person to share a story about advocacy, they are immediately able to narrow it down. In a nutshell, they tell us that advocacy consists of three parts;

- standing in front (doing for),
- standing beside in allyship (doing with), and standing behind (helping to do for oneself).
So, where does the discomfort come from then?

We are going suggest that it comes from a place of embarrassment or not-knowing. Sharing these stories allows us to witness/experience the essence of advocacy within practice yet it appears we get lost in knowing how to operationalize advocacy in our practice. Advocacy is a vital part of our Child and Youth Care (CYC) role and we seem to be able to identify experiences where we know we didn't do enough for the well-being of the children, youth and families we work with, or when we our efforts to promote advocacy were successful. However, it seems we can get wrapped up in the preoccupa-

tion of all that could and does go wrong for us, as individuals, throughout the advocacy process. Plain and simple, we are afraid: afraid to make mistakes, afraid to rock the boat for fear of being excluded by our peers or perhaps losing our careers altogether, and most of all, we are afraid that by not engaging in advocacy we are not, in reality, doing anything at all.

When we act from a place of fear it begins to govern our practices. When fear is present, it is difficult to engage in true, genuine relationships, as we are no longer grounded in the ethics and values of practice; our mind and presence is elsewhere. This can result in a separation, cutting us off from one another and other ways of knowing. When we are disconnected from others we lose perspective potentially jeopardizing our effectiveness and success. We begin to narrow our approach and lose out on utilizing all of our skills, theories, and tools. When we begin to doubt our abilities, or refrain from growth and development, thereby limiting ourselves to only that which is comfortable and 'safe'.

To limit the above from occurring, we challenge you over the next month to assess your own engagement in advocacy. Start by keeping a daily log of the moments when you did or could have practiced standing in front (speaking/doing for), beside (speaking together/doing with) and behind (helping others to speak/do for oneself). Then, reflect to see if any threads exist. Consider exploring the following:

- Take your professional temperature, see

<http://www.cyc-net.org/quote4/quote-2251.htm>

- Did you do enough? If not, why not. If not, how will you address this in future practice?
- Look closely at what you recorded and determine if your action was guided primarily by individual comfort and safety or was it in the best interest of the child and their development?
- Which was the most common for you to engage in: standing in front, beside or behind and why might this have been the case.
- If you were able to teach others to seek what they need on their own, how did you do this? What tools did you use or perhaps wish you would have had?

Then submit your findings to the CYC advocacy project, www.cycadvocacyproject.org and continue to challenge yourself to always do more. We leave you some recorded words from our project by Mark Krueger, "Don't go into this field without being prepared to be an advocate for the work that you are doing ... it is not a field to stand by in and let things continue to happen that seem detrimental to the well-being of the children".

Thank you for sharing and we look forward to hearing about your experiences and exploration!





Postcard from Leon Fulcher

SEPTEMBER 2015

Hello again colleagues. I couldn't visit Cape Town without spending a few moments sharing thoughts about our visit. As indicated last month, we were in Cape Town to help celebrate the 40th Anniversary Conference of the National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW). Some arrived early for the pre-Conference Day on Residential Child Care which generated a lot of buzz amongst conference delegates. Then everything got started at the District 6 Museum with a Welcoming Reception.



Boiling Clouds around the Cape of Good Hope

The Sixth Municipal District of Cape Town was established in 1867, originally as a mixed community of freed slaves, merchants, artisans, labourers and immigrants. Racial cleansing of the District began in 1901 when Black South Africans were forced out. In 1966, District 6 was declared a 'white area under the Group Areas Act of 1950 and so the long-standing residents of District 6 were relocated as part of the Cape Town 'urban renewal' policies of the Apartheid Government. The neighbourhood still carries the scars, although three churches and a mosque were left standing. The District 6 Museum continues to do important work around timelines and life stories of former residents, relocating a sense of belonging to a community that had its heart ripped out.



NACCW Pre-Conference Day on Residential Child Care

We learned about an early British Colonial Medical Inspector at the Cape, someone called James Barry, who between 1822 and 1826, championed the cause of the sick, the slaves, the prisoners and the

lepers, and also established standards for medicine and pharmacy at the Cape. General James Barry was ousted from the Colony for outspokenness but after an illustrious medical career during which Barry was said to have cured more people than Florence Nightingale, James Barry on her death was found to be a woman!



Cape Town Harbour with Table Mountain

Cape Town Harbour has to be one of the World's most beautiful places, and we were there during a week of glorious sunshine. One can be easily lulled into the magic of the place: a week of cloudless skies; the sounds and smells of Africa; people-watching opportunities abound; fine dining and waterside pubs; carefully located sculpture and art works; a sea lion frolicking around boats moored in the harbour; and buskers of all and sundry. We didn't climb Table Mountain but did take the cable car up and back!

Busking around Cape Town Harbour the day we visited, we came across a string quartet of Granddads with the Cello being



Cape Town Harbour Sculpture

played bass guitar style. They had us tapping our feet to the old guys' memorable tunes and of course I bought their CD. Another busking group that caught our attention was the Umbiyozo Youth Foundation Dancers who were fund-raising for a national event in which they hoped to perform. We watched these impressive young dancers for some time and marvelled at the work of very competent youth workers who had instilled both competencies as young dancers but self confidence amongst young women!



Umbiyozo Youth Foundation Dancers

I smiled as one of the young stars of the Umbiyozo Dance Troupe checked her smartphone for Tweets or emails while others were performing. A true “Digital Native” as well as already being a gifted young dancer!



Umbiyozo Youth Foundation Dancer and Digital Native

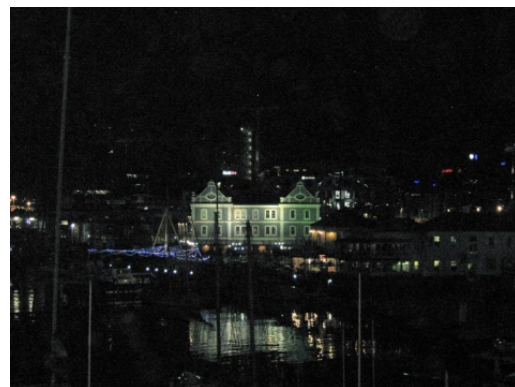
We stayed on after the conference to enjoy Cape Town another day. This gave us opportunity to meet up with Carly, Gerald and Leroy from the Mamelani Projects (www.mamelani.org.za) one of two projects in South Africa trialling work with young people leaving care and transitioning to semi-independent living.

Darkness over Cape Town Harbour reminds me of what I called *South Africa's Eskom Load-Shedding Metaphor* for child

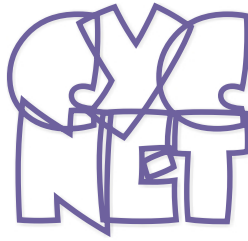


Cape Town Friends Gerald (l), Leroy (c) and Carly (r) from Mamelani Youth Projects

and youth care work. Load shedding is a controlled shutdown to protect the power system from a total blackout, which can occur when there is too much demand and too little supply of energy. If human energy demands are not managed across an organisation and its workforce – wheehr measured as energy, time or re-sources – then the entire agency network of services may be placed at risk of over-load and shut-down. Care for the Caregivers is promoted by the Ercom Load-Shedding Metaphor!



Cape Town Harbour at Night



THE INTERNATIONAL CHILD AND YOUTH CARE NETWORK

CYC-Online Direct Advertising Rates

Size	Standard	x3 insertions	x6 insertions	x12 insertions
Full page	\$250.00	\$200.00	\$150.00	\$100.00
1/2 page	\$187.50	\$150.00	\$112.50	\$ 85.00
1/4 page	\$125.00	\$100.00	\$ 75.00	\$ 50.00
1/8 page	\$100.00	\$ 75.00	\$ 50.00	\$ 30.00

Price is per monthly issue, per insertion. Full amount payable at first insertion. Deadline - 7 days before monthend.

MATERIAL SPECIFICATIONS

Please send all relevant artwork to admin@cyc-net.org

Files: Only TIFF, PDF, EPS or high resolution JPG will be accepted. All images should be CMYK.

Image resolution 300 dpi at 100%

Fonts: If using PDF, either embed fonts or please supply ALL fonts with the documents, or convert fonts to paths.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Size	Layout	Width	Height
Full page	Portrait (5mm bleed)	200mm	260mm
1/2 page	Portrait Landscape	95mm 200mm	260mm 125mm
1/4 page	Portrait Landscape	95mm 200mm	125mm 60mm
1/8 page	Portrait Landscape	40mm 95mm	125mm 60mm



EndNotes



"There is no hope of joy except in human friendships.

— *Antoine de
Sainte-Exupery*

"Children see magic because they look for it."

— *Christopher Moore*

"The soul is healed by being with children."

— *Fyodor Dostoyevsky,
Russian novelist and
philosopher*

"Children are likely to live up to what you believe of them."

— *Lady Bird Johnson, Former First Lady
of the United States*

"Children are great imitators. So give them something great to imitate."

— *Anonymous*

"Hold a true friend with both your hands."

— *Nigerian Proverb*

"Am I not destroying my enemies when I make friends of them?"

— *Abraham Lincoln*



"Only where children gather is there any real chance of fun."

— *Mignon McLaughlin, journalist, author*

SirThomas More: Why not be a teacher? You'd be a fine teacher; perhaps a great one.

Richard Rich: If I was, who would know it?

SirThomas More: You; your pupils; your friends; God. Not a bad public, that.

The bird are singing because they're so glad I'm awake.

— *Jacy, age 4*

It's sad that the BBC is toning down Dennis the Menace for a cartoon series. He is losing his weapons, catapult and pea-shooter, will no longer pick on Walter the Softie, and his ferocious grimace is to be replaced by a charming boyish smile.

— *Simon Hoggart*



"There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they grow up in peace."

— *Kofi A. Annan, UN Secretary-General*

"Usually children spend more time in the garden than anybody else. It is where they learn about the world, because they can be in it unsupervised, yet protected. Some gardeners will remember from their own earliest recollections that no one sees the garden as vividly, or cares about it as passionately, as the child who grows up in it."

— *Carol Williams*

"Know what it is to be a child . . . To see a world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of
your hand
And Eternity in an hour."

— *William Blake*

"What a child doesn't receive he can seldom later give."

— *P. D. James, Time to Be in Earnest*



information

CYC-Online is published monthly by [The CYC-Net Press](#). It is an e-journal and therefore not available in printed form. However, readers are welcome to print out pages or chapters as desired.

Editors

Thom Garfat (Canada) thom@cyc-net.org

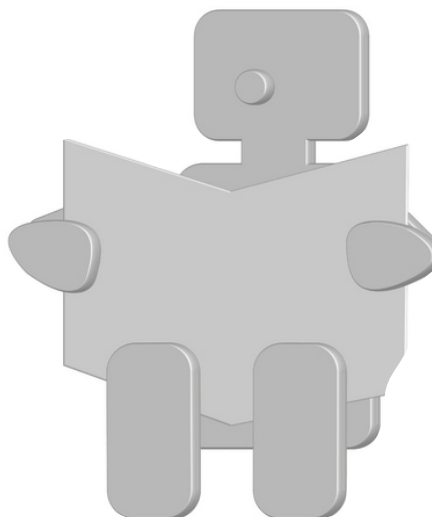
Brian Gannon (South Africa) brian@cyc-net.org

Correspondence

The Editors welcome your input, comment, requests, etc. Write to cyconline@cyc-net.org

Advertising

Only advertising related to the profession, programs, courses, books, conferences etc. will be accepted. Rates and specifications are listed over the page, or email advertising@cyc-net.org





**ONLINE JOURNAL OF
THE INTERNATIONAL CHILD AND YOUTH CARE NETWORK (CYC-NET)**

www.cyc-net.org

Published by



ISSN 1605-7406