

# CYC-Online

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A Journal for Those who Live or Work  
with Children and Young People

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## MSc CHILD and YOUTH

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# Sowing Seeds

**Mark Smith**

**T**his editorial comes at a point when I am winding down from my full-time academic position after almost 25 years. It feels weird to say this as it seems like only yesterday that I took up my first academic post to develop the Masters in Residential Child Care at the University of Strathclyde. A couple of years into this post, I received an email from one Thom Garfat asking if I would do some writing for CYC-Online, which got me involved with the CYC community. Ironically, I anticipate more time to do such writing when I am no longer in thrall to what I recall Leon Fulcher calling the administrivia of academic life. In my earlier years as an academic, I didn't quite appreciate just what he meant by this – I do now! As if to make my point, my inbox has started pinging with requests to action contract extensions for staff I don't even know ...

I could get angry at the banality of this proliferation of administrative demands, but I am determined not to. As a former residential care worker, I remember kids who had never really been any trouble during their placements becoming difficult as it approached time for them to leave. We understood it as a sort of separation anxiety. But I'm not entirely separating ... I will continue working for a couple of days a week for the time being. So, no separation anxiety for me.



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Moreover, at the back of my mind, I have Reinhold Niebuhr's prayer:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

So, with this guidance in mind, I'll take this opportunity to reflect back on a few things. When I moved from practice to academia, I thought I could bring about change. Naively, I thought this would happen through reasoned argument and the force of my writing. What a forlorn hope that was.

I also thought, equally naively, that we were on the brink of a vibrant 'new beginning' for residential child care (for that was my own background and that is where the roots of CYC lie). In Scotland, twenty-five years ago, there was considerable investment in the training of residential care workers, of which my post was but one strand. I expected new ideas, conceptualisation, debates ... If truth be told, we struggled to move beyond the tired old ideas and some of the new ones were just plain dumb. The attention given to residential child care and the attendant hopes for an enhanced status for residential care workers came to little and has now all but petered out.



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Internationally, the agendas of global NGOs, no doubt staffed by bright young things eager to position themselves on the 'right side of history', plug dogmas of de-institutionalisation, not even considering that this might be neither possible nor desirable across much of the world, a point made powerfully in Tuhin Islam and Leon Fulcher's series of books (Residential Child and Youth Care in a Developing World) published by [The CYC-Net Press](#).

Looking beyond CYC, university departments of social work, in which I have plied my trade are in a similarly bad way. We are struggling to recruit students to a profession that is haemorrhaging its existing workforce. We have gone beyond the point where as educators, we can do much to influence things. The current situation is the result of political and economic decisions and directions that do not value public services and particularly don't value people services, where practice can be messy and outcomes uncertain.



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There is also a broader cultural backdrop to this situation. I was speaking to a group of Catholic priests yesterday about my (relatively) recent book about the stories of boys brought up in a school I worked in run by a religious order of Brothers. The priests, I guess, had signed up at a time when they believed they would make the world a better place. Yet, their vision of community and of social justice has been sapped, submerged beneath demands to attend to health and safety and a host of other administrative requirements, which deflect from their mission to create a better world.

Twenty-five years ago, I realised that it was time for me to leave direct practice when the local authority I worked for began to insist that I and my colleagues needed to undertake food hygiene training in order to make kids a sandwich. And now, having managed to avoid stepping under a ladder, electrocuting myself or setting different buildings on fire over a period of 25 years, I now find myself trying to escape university life before they catch up with me on my failure to do health and safety training. In a similar vein, one of my sons has done a lot of social care work. The only training he has ever had is on safeguarding – nothing about how to best care for someone, certainly nothing on any ideas around care or the kind of values that might underpin it. Just, repeatedly, safeguarding. None of these developments are about making life better for employees or for those they work with but with pandering to the demands of insurers. The consequence of this is that we privilege organisational concerns about risk over the kind of values that, I hope, brought us into CYC and ought to guide what we do in it.



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But I've promised I'm not going to go out bitter. Having already quoted one prayer, another comes to mind (I only know a couple and do not go about quoting them – funny how they came to mind). The poem was used at a homily for the martyred Bishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero. It goes thus:

We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.  
We are prophets of a future not our own.

My hope is that I may have planted a few seeds from time to time. And I'll keep plugging away doing bits of doctoral supervision, doing some (probably more) writing in the hope that I might plant a few more, realising that I will likely need to accept that I will not necessarily see them grow.

To finish on a serene note, I count myself to have been incredibly privileged to have had two (linked) careers in practice and academia that I have thoroughly enjoyed. I have met some great, inspiring people along the way and am reassured that we still have access to resources such as CYC-net and the community that it serves.



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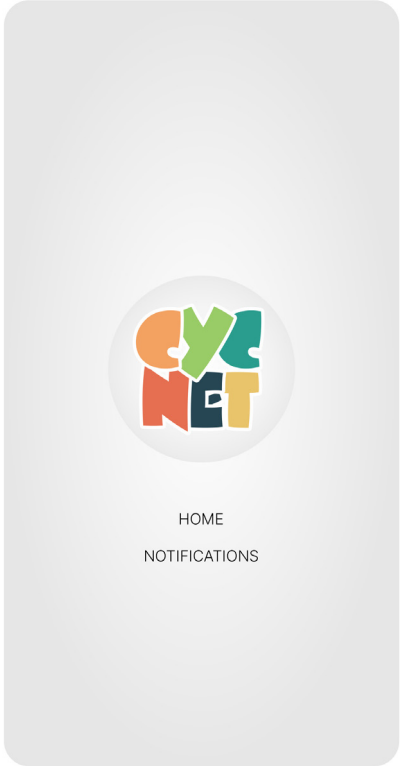
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# The Privatization Creep in Child and Youth Services

**Kiaras Gharabaghi**

In many jurisdictions around the world, child and youth services have always existed as a combination of public and private services, sometimes as distinct service systems (one public and one private) and sometimes as an integrated system in which private services augment public services. In countries like Canada, Australia and perhaps also the UK, we have been somewhat complacent about this co-existence, likely because we simply assumed that the political cultures in these countries generally value public services and have given rise to fairly large public service systems and associated institutions that extend from health care and education to post-secondary institutions, child protection, welfare and social assistance, universal pension plans, and more. In the United States, private services are much more obviously prevalent and somehow no one is surprised because we tend to associate private service with the political culture of that country.

What is of concern is the degree to which we misunderstand and make assumptions about the role of public service in child and youth services. We erroneously believe that much of our system is public, with some aspects



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featuring private actors sometimes to positive effect and often to negative effect. This is simply not true. In fact, in some countries associated with very strong public service systems, such as Canada, child and youth services are overwhelmingly private. What is of even greater concern is that almost all the literature related to child and youth services, whether it is research-based literature or grey literature focused on policy frameworks and implementation sciences, continues to be based on the general assumption that we are talking primarily about a public service sector. Our critiques of child welfare systems, for example, make extensive demands of governments to change the day-to-day operations of specific services and procedures as if governments actually operated these services or control these procedures. At the moment, the only relatively holistic work taking a closer look at private service (in the specific context of residential care and treatment) is that of Lisa Holmes and her teams in the UK; outside of that, we are engaged in discussions about a sector of service while mislocating that sector in the public sphere. Inadvertently, our lack of attention to private service has opened the door for more private service to creep into our child and youth services, and for the concept of private service to become firmly established as the norm.

One concern is that we seem to misunderstand the difference between private and public service and label private services as public when in fact they are not. In Ontario (where I live), for example, the child protection system is operationalized through Children's Aid Societies. Many people believe these to be public entities. They are not. Children's Aid Societies are private, incorporated entities, albeit not for profit (often charitable) and governed by a Board of Directors (but run by professional employees). We often see them as public entities because they are mandated by government legislation (The Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017) and regulated by an expansive network of governmental bureaucratic



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departments. They are also funded almost entirely by government, which again makes them seem like public entities. Given the deep involvement of government in Children's Aid Societies through legislation, regulation, and funding, we might be excused for mistaking these entities as public ones and dismiss my point that they are in fact private as simple semantics. What does it matter that they are private entities when everything they do is enabled and closely monitored by government. For all intents and purposes, they are public entities even if legally they remain firmly embedded in the private sector. Well, it does matter.

For example, as private entities, Children's Aid Societies evolve not in lockstep with public discourse, culture, and ideology, but as a function of the professionalized and highly insulated world of child welfare professionals about whom the general public knows very little. In fact, it is a world that is largely inaccessible to the general public, and one that therefore is also not accountable to the general public. When bad things happen in child welfare, we blame governments for the work done in private entities and we leave the private entities largely alone. In any other private sector context, when a company fails miserably, the leadership gets fired and replaced immediately. In child welfare, when children die unnecessarily, we instead look to the leadership of the organization in whose care the children died to make it better. In other words, when mistakes are made, we direct blame at those who did *not* make the mistake (government) and we demand solutions from those who *did* make the mistake (the private entity). Hopefully I am not the only one who finds that a little strange.

In reality, this uneasy relationship of public mandates and regulation on the one hand and service through private entities on the other hand has never really resulted in a transparent and accountable system of child and youth services. For the past few decades, we have continuously watched private service creep deeper and deeper into this sector. From the 1970s to



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the 2010s, for example, private service, mostly of the for-profit type, has been the primary vehicle for service provision in the out of home care sub-sector. It is important to note that private for-profit residential care providers are also subject to legislation and the regulatory processes of government and are almost entirely funded *indirectly* through governments (by having government funds given to Children’s Aid Societies be passed along as payment for placements in private group homes or privately operated foster homes – it is public money paying for those placements). We have seen the devastating impact of allowing care to unfold through private, for-profit entities. That impact is now subject to class action lawsuits and widely recognized as having deeply and adversely altered the life course of many sub-groups of young people, most notably Indigenous and Black young people.

Although there is much more recognition today than there was in the past that private group homes run for profit are very much a problem, and there is even a crackdown on such places on the part of government licensing divisions, the reality is that much of the group home system in Ontario and elsewhere continues to be a privately, for-profit operated system, even if some private companies have been shut down or are subject to enormous criticism, lawsuits, and even criminal investigations. More disturbingly, whereas for many decades, private for-profit out of home care was largely based on group home models, such care is now based on private, for-profit foster care models, which has been one of the fastest growing sub-sectors in child welfare in Canada, and from what I can tell, also in Australia and the UK, and this despite multiple preventable child deaths in such settings. And things get considerably worse.

Today, one of the greatest challenges facing child protection sectors at least in the global north is the emergence of large numbers of young people with what is commonly referred to as “complex needs”. These are young



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people with multiple developmental and mental health challenges that manifest through difficult behaviours, including extreme violence, self-harm and suicide. The emergence of this trend comes at a time when much of the public discourse has shifted away from group care settings and has endorsed, almost fanatically, the concept of family-based care. We assume that because governments are echoing (or parroting) the rhetoric about family-based care that this is in fact the direction we are going in. But it is not at all the direction we are going in. To the contrary, the private child protection sector described earlier has already privatized the care for children and youth with complex needs and is looking to private for-profit entities to meet the placement needs for these children. That insulated world of the child welfare professional elite does not reflect the political cultural shifts in public discourse. To the contrary, it aims to continue the decades of the privatization of care it already enabled and is comfortable with. The result is that the family-based care we often talk about is actually private, highly institutionalized (or carceral - take your pick) care offered by the very same for-profit entities that previously operated the private, for-profit group homes that we have collectively shunned as horrific places. For these private for-profit entities, family-based care is simply a new product line they developed in response to new consumer (Children's Aid Societies) demand.



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Privatization is creeping into child and youth services through other channels as well. For decades now we have been valorizing the concept of treatment in child and youth services, which has given rise to an industry promoting and selling evidence-based practice models. This industry is itself a for-profit and private industry selling its goods to the highest bidder through licensing fee models. It is accompanied by a training and consultation industry, also private and for-profit, that is sweeping child and youth service sectors in unprecedented ways and that is in fact reinforcing the necessity and value of the products being marketed for profit. Beyond that, to the extent that children and youth involved in child welfare services are actually exposed to treatment services, such as counselling or psychiatric services, these too are predominantly offered by private individuals or by private, for-profit entities promising to match children and youth with counsellors and psychiatric services they secure through contracts with appropriately credentialed professionals.

Even inside of seemingly public agencies (such as not for profit and charitable agencies offering services and placements to children and youth), privatization is creeping in at profound levels. For example, yet another sector that has grown exponentially in child and youth services is the agency-based staffing sector. Here, private, for-profit companies contract with individual professionals (usually at the bottom of the professional hierarchy, such as child and youth workers and personal support workers, sometimes nurses) and provide staffing to programs and services operated by the seemingly public agencies. Never mind that in so doing, almost everything we know about high quality service provisions goes out the window; agency staff are temporary, often appear just for a single shift or for a week or a month, which negates relationships and meaningful child and youth care practice altogether. This sector is growing because in true private sector style, seemingly public agencies avoid



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making commitments to hiring permanent staff and having to manage those staff, pay them benefits, and assume risks and costs associated with potential workplace injuries and the like. In other words, the staff who work in group homes, support foster carers, provide treatment in family-based care or intensive treatment settings are often actually sub-contracted workers who are unsupervised, variably qualified, and accountable to no one.

The privatization creep in child and youths service systems is enormous and accelerating. We often talk about our moral and ethical obligations to care for the most vulnerable groups in our society and to do so as part of our collective social contract. Care, in our rhetoric, is understood as a public good. In our practices, however, care is a private product, one that enriches entrepreneurial types exploiting the complacency we have maintained for decades now in assuming our public responsibilities toward children, their families, and their communities. This system is enabled by the institutions that we think of as public, including Children's Aid Societies, Child and Youth Mental Health Centres, and all manner of non-governmental organizations we think are public entities. It is critically important to understand that child and youth services in countries like Canada, Australia and the UK, are largely private sector services, driven by profit motives, and dealing in products. The commodification of children and youth is nearly complete. In this context, the death of a child in care is not tragic; there is a nearly infinite supply chain of product.

As is always the case, some groups are and will continue to be impacted even more adversely than others. Racial groups subject to ongoing genocides or oppressive systemic and structural dynamics have and will continue to serve as the bulk of the market and sustain the system that is destroying them. Privatization is a euphemism for a shift from humanization to commodification. And we all know what happens when humans become



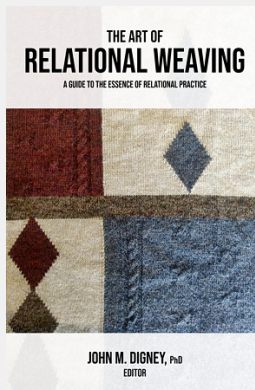
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commodified. Transatlantic slavery is one example. There are many more. The absolute minimum step we must take right now is to seriously pay attention to the privatization creep in child and youth services specifically, and in human services more generally.

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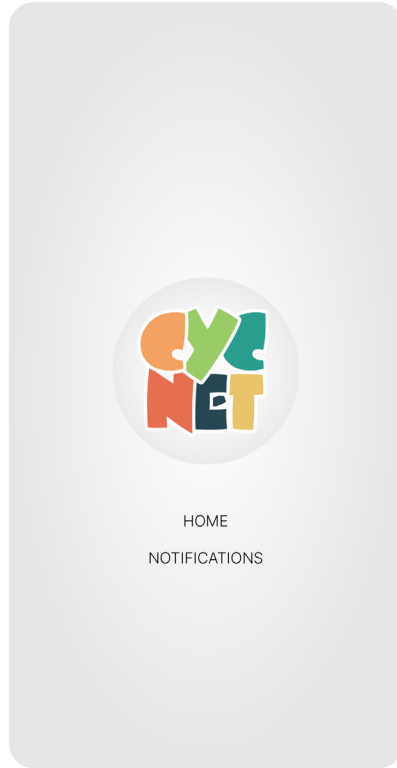


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# The Relationship is the Intervention

Rollout of the Learning and Development (L&D) Approach and Framework for CYC Practitioners in 25 SOS Member Associations

**Elisabeth Ullmann-Gheri and Coenraad de Beer**

## **Relational child and youth care practice**

Child and Youth Care (CYC) Practitioners<sup>1</sup> work with children, young people, and families with complex needs with the goal of supporting them, so children and young people can "become their strongest selves". CYC practitioners play an essential role in achieving such positive outcomes for children and young people without parental care or at risk of losing it. They skilfully navigate complex and demanding situations and utilise everyday life

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of SOS Children's Villages, CYC practitioners are staff who directly work with children, young people, and their families. They include family-like caregivers, youth care workers, professional foster parents, small group home workers, and family strengthening field workers.



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moments as learning opportunities that help children and young people experience themselves and others in different and positive ways.

This *relational child and youth care practice* is based on the CYC practitioners' awareness, competence, and skills – a pillar of the Learning and Development Approach (L&D), which has recently been rolled out in several SOS member associations in Africa. In close cooperation with the regional offices, Train-the-Facilitators and Train-the-L&D support staff programmes were delivered to strengthen colleagues in member associations to train and support their CYC practitioners.

Relational practice is not simply a set of skills or techniques, but a unique way of being in the world, and therefore of being with children and young people, their families, and communities. Working from a relational perspective, the CYC practitioner continually attends to the space between themselves and others as something that is co-created (Garfat et al, 2018). Actively paying attention to the space between them and others can also be called reflective practice. In this way of being with others, both parties must experience relational safety and connectedness - the relationship is the intervention (Stuart, 2014).



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To effectively convey to CYC practitioners the essence of the relational child and youth care approach, theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient. It is important that L&D facilitators embody this approach in the interactions with others. A relational approach is not taught; it is experienced.

Frederic, Alternative Care Coordinator Nairobi and Train-the-Facilitator programme participant, describes some of his learnings in these words, “I realized that other than being the supervisor, there is a lot I need to do to ensure what I call “the momentum” for doing what the caregivers are supposed to do - to partner with them, work with them side by side, and to play a supportive role.

### **Four key roles in implementing the L&D approach**

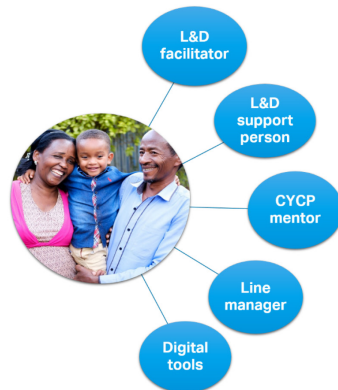
So far, staff members of 37 member associations in Africa, The Middle East, and Europe were trained. Out of those, 24 countries have already started the rollout.

Four main roles support the implementation of the L&D approach for CYC practitioners, bringing it to life together with the practitioners:

1. the L&D facilitator
2. the L&D support person
3. and the CYC mentor
4. Line manager.

#### **The L&D facilitator**

Each country identifies two people as future L&D facilitators, based on an L&D facilitator job description and profile.



Their role is to deliver the Initial Training Workshop (ITW) for CYC practitioners as well as similar workshops in their country. They require the competence to facilitate groups of CYC practitioners according to the learning paradigm of a learner-centric and competency-based approach. This implies a very interactive and participatory approach and an understanding of being a "guide by the side" instead of a "sage at the stage".

The Train-the-Facilitator (TTF) Programme prepares them to run these workshops based on the L&D approach and methodology. The programme consists of a series of online personal activities that can be worked on at any time before the scheduled live calls that support and reinforce the content in the online activities. After this preparatory online part, a face-to-face workshop allows TTF participants to experience and practice ITW facilitation skills in a safe environment.



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In the Initial Training Workshop, L&D facilitators encourage workshop participants to create relational experiences with children and young people, in which they feel safe and connected. Similarly, L&D facilitators create such experiences in their interaction with the CYC practitioners and workshop participants. This way, CYC practitioners and other participants do not only gain theoretical understanding of the L&D approach, but it becomes an experiential reality for them.

One caregivers' comment after having participated in week 1: *"Despite our local customs and tradition, no child should be discriminated against. Knowing your values helps you to do your work."*

The L&D facilitators are on their own "learning journey" of improving their facilitation skills and RCYC knowledgebase over time. Their learning is supported by an active Community of Practice which consists of online space as well as monthly calls, in which experience can be shared, challenges discussed, and new inputs enjoyed.

### **The L&D support person**

Each programme location identifies two to three people as L&D support persons, based on a job description and profile. The L&D support person training programme prepares them to provide one-on-one support to CYC practitioners.

Their role is to accompany the individual CYC practitioner on their learning and development journey, in the light of the competencies described in the Competency Portfolio. They will need to have regular one-on-one meetings with the CYC practitioner, usually in person, and develop a trusting relationship over time.

In the one-on-one meetings with CYC practitioners, the L&D support person will:



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- reinforce the new SOS L&D approach that the CYC practitioner will be experiencing.
- help them to prepare for the Initial Training Workshop (ITW) and the experience they will have there.
- help them reflect on what they have learned from each ITW week and what they will be doing differently.
- support them with organizing access to relevant learning materials and resources.
- help them reflect on their daily work and use their Learning Log to record their reflections.
- motivate them to keep on track on their Learning Journey.
- deal with any related issues and refer the CYC practitioner to any relevant third parties if they need specialist support.

### **The CYC Mentor**

Each programme also selects two to three practitioners to take on a mentoring role and offers them preparation and support in the CYC Mentor Training Programme.

Mentors can play an important role in supporting and encouraging CYC practitioners on their professional journey - by providing them with guidance regarding their day-to-day child and youth care tasks and by continuously encouraging them on their learning and development journey.

A CYC mentor is a trusted and competent "peer advisor" who:

- supports the development of other less experienced practitioners.
- lives the relational philosophy in every aspect of their interaction with others and the mentee.



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- provides direction, advice, motivation, guidance, feedback, and emotional support.
- helps to solve practical problems, and sometimes ethical dilemmas.
- translates theory into practice, which mostly only happens in real-life practice situations.
- is familiar with relevant theories on child and youth development and demonstrates how these are applied through their actions and interactions with children and young people.
- offers one-on-one support as well as through peer support groups.

Our model of mentoring closely follows the relational CYC model of change articulated by Thom Garfat (2024), so that the mentoring is a mirror of the change principles employed by CYC practitioners in their work with children.

### **The Line Manager**

The line manager’s role is to ensure a nurturing learning environment for all staff members, to provide support, and do annual performance appraisal talks. Their prioritization of L&D for CYC practitioners is key, so the required resources are made available.

Therefore, senior managers, training managers, line managers, and practice supervisors will all need to understand this L&D approach and promote it as a way of learning throughout the organization.

### **Fifth “Role” - Digital Support Tools**

According to one of the five key principles of the L&D approach learning is “multi-modal”, meaning that we learn as we do our daily jobs, interact



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with people, and discover new things ourselves. One digital tool developed by SOS Children’s Villages to serve this purpose is “Rafiki”.

Rafiki is an AI-powered Digital Care Assistant (DCA), available via mobile phones, that provides CYC practitioners with instant access to information on child and youth care topics, based on the L&D competency portfolios.

The interactive application allows both caregivers from alternative care services and parents from family strengthening programmes to ask questions regarding many topics that parents need to know about. It helps users understand complex issues and is simple to use. So far, it is being used in 12 SOS member associations, in English, French and Somali, with approximately 1000 caregivers accessing it.

Besides Rafiki, CYC practitioners are obviously encouraged to use any other online training and/or information they find useful to support their development.

Our next article will focus on the CYC Practitioner’s Learning Journey.



**TW Tunisia, 2021**



**Train-the-Facilitator in Ethiopia, 2022**



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**ITW Initial Training Workshop for  
Caregivers, Nairobi, 2022**



**ITW Ivory Coast**

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Reflecting on the 2023 Women’s World Cup

# Lessons and Strategies for Youth Serving Organizations in Championing Inclusion for Black Girls in Sports

**Treisha Hylton**

**T**he 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup (WWC) took place between July 20 and August 20 in New Zealand and Australia. It was the largest ever, with the most teams participating, most tickets sold (1.8 million), new and better partnerships, and increased media coverage—and with it, increased viewership (FIFA Statistics, 2023). The WWC brought in \$570 million USD in revenue, the second highest income of any global sport only after the 2022 Men’s World Cup in Qatar (Carp & Dixon, 2023). Arguably, it was the best WWC to have taken place since the tournament's inception in 1999. Nine of the 32 participating teams were coached by women, and the number of Black women footballers playing increased



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significantly with the addition of teams from Zambia, Morocco, and Haiti. On August 20, at the end of a thrilling final, a new WWC champion was crowned, Spain's *La Roja* (The Reds).

Although the WWC draws attention as an exciting sports event, it also serves as a notable instance of the legacy left by inequitable structures and policies in the world of sport, which results in missed opportunities and altered life trajectories for highly talented athletes (Bruening et al., 2005; Gabay, 2013; White, 2021). Theorized through the lens of Black Feminist thought and my own experiences as a Black woman in football, the WWC serves as an ideal case study to delve deeper into the role of Black girls and young women in sport and how it has evolved over time. I consider what the increased representation means for young Black women and girls as well as the new opportunities presented for youth serving organizations to engage more directly with Black girls and young women. Such engagement would not only foster support for Black girls in football, but also aligns seamlessly with the overarching mission of youth serving organizations - emphasizing the enhancement of overall youth well-being and development.

### **Writing through the Lens of a Black Feminist, an Immigrant, and a Midfielder**

This reflection and analysis is framed through the lens of a Black Feminist scholar who possesses a genuine passion for sports and recognizes the intersectionality of sports and social services as a crucial yet insufficiently explored domain within the field of youth services (Collins, 1989). There are several reasons for applying a Black Feminist lens to this reflection. First, as Black Feminists, we believe that Black women's lives and experiences are valuable and their stories should be celebrated (Arinze & McGarry, 2021; Gabay, 2013), both in contexts that fall within and transcend the game of football and sports. In addition, Black Feminisms offer an



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intersectional approach in which race, gender, and multiple oppressions explode (Arinze & McGarry, 2021; Hylton, 2022). Black Feminisms acknowledge the existence and impact of these explosions while upholding the value of the experiences of Black women footballers. Further, activism and social justice are key tenets of Black Feminism (Collins, 1989). There is ample evidence that Black women have always fought for change and equity in sports and broader society (Davis, 2016; Gabay, 2013; Ogbé, 2022). Indeed, Black women athletes have paved the way (Davis, 2016). Finally, Black Feminism offers new knowledges and insights about football that perhaps have been silenced and overlooked amidst the often white, male voices in the world of sport.

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### ***Lived Experiences as Theory***

My perspective is furthermore informed by years of active participation in football – I was a midfielder. Football to me is the most beautiful game. It is simple yet filled with emotion. I often say that football comes from the grassroots and lives in the community (Hylton, 2023b). As an immigrant, the team of my birthplace, Jamaica, is always in my heart. Canada, where I have spent most of my life, also has a strong team for which I cheer. I cheer for Black girls and women footballers no matter where they are in the world. Their victories are mine as well; their stories advance those of Black women, football, sports, and Black histories more broadly.

Watching the WWC was exhilarating. The athletes were showcasing their skills and highlighting the legitimacy of women’s sports. I felt like a little girl playing again, heart racing and full of joy. I was proud of teams like Jamaica, which made history by being the first Caribbean nation to advance to the knockout stage—I echoed their cry, “we likkle but we tallawah.” For Canada, it was a disappointing world cup, as we/they did not advance out of their group stages, and other issues such as pay equity, the lack of youth development programs, and the retirement of its longtime superstar, Christine Sinclair, were dominant narratives.

### **Representation Matters**

At the 2023 WWC, Black women were noticeable, with the tournament featuring the largest-ever number of Black women players. Among the diverse group of Black footballers were the United States’ Sophie Smith and Trinity Rodman, as well as rising stars such as teenagers Linda Caicedo of Colombia and Salma Paralluelo of Spain. Canada featured home-grown talents Kadeisha Buchanan and Ashley Lawrence. Europe can also claim some of the best footballers at the tournament, such as Kadidiatou Diani



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(France) and Lauren James (England). Thembi Kgatlana of South Africa, Nigerian superstar Asisat Oshoala, and Barbra Banda of Zambia showed what is to come from Black African footballers. Khadija Shaw of Jamaica, Melchie Dumornay of Haiti, Marta Cox of Panama, and Kerolin Nicoli Israel Ferraz of Brazil well represented the Caribbean and Central and South America. Black girl magic was on full display. These players showcased to the world the many ways in which Black woman can exist on the football field. From their different religions and cultures to their different skills and styles of play, even to the colour of their braids and nails, they represented and were unapologetically Black women. Indeed, their way of being was an expression of culture and joy that had not been present in previous tournaments.

### **Black Girls and Sports Culture: Hair and Resistance**

“Black girls are the purest form of art” (Okantah, 2023) — meaning that, whatever the context, Black women have always contributed to shaping the culture of their environment. As Nikki Giovanni alludes to in her poetry (Giovanni, 1993), Black women make everything better! The Black women on the US team took the internet by storm when they graced the WWC in their stylish gender-neutral suits, designed by Nike and Martine Rose. Crystal Dunn stood out particularly due to the avant-garde yellow wrap-around sunglasses that highlighted her cutting-edge style. On and off the field, Black women displayed expressions of culture and joy that provided a counter to Eurocentric, male-dominated narratives about how football can or should be.

As I watched the games, I noticed the Black players’ hair, and how they wore it to express themselves. Black women’s bodies have always been sites of politics and resistance—a reflection of the larger society (Griffin,



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1996; Mowatt et al., 2013). Black women’s hair has been policed and discriminated against in many ways, leaving them without jobs, unable to participate in some sports, or forced to conform to Eurocentric styles (Baylor, 2023; Harris & Davis, 2023). Yet the Black women I watched on the football field no longer subscribe to Eurocentric hair styles; instead, they proudly wear their afro, locks, braids, and other natural styles. Kadidiatou Diani wore her braids in many colours—lavender, gray, or blue for Les Bleues, and sometimes included a ribbon in her tight coils, which she wears long and beautiful, a complement to her expert football skills and expressions of joy when she scores. Jamaica’s Deneisha Blackwood wore her short afro in a light pink. Nigeria’s Rasheedat Ajibade represented her team’s colours with hairstyles of bright green and blue, while her teammate, Asisat Oshoala, kept her hair cut low to the scalp. Others wore their hair in protective styles. A protective hairstyle serves as a safeguarding technique in which the hair ends are securely tucked away, reducing the need for frequent manipulation (Simpson, 2017). This practice is particularly essential for Black women footballers, providing a reprieve for their hair ends from adverse weather conditions during sports activities. All this self-expression is important to the culture of football, illustrating that the football field is a place where Black women can be their authentic selves (Brown, 2018).

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## **Black Girls and Football Skills**

Too often, when Black women and girls' athleticism is described, it is not their skills that are highlighted (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Vertinsky & Captain, 1998). I have noticed how media commentators describe us using animal-like characteristics. For example, announcers rarely mention that Black women footballers are strategic or intelligent; rather, they focus on players' strength and speed. In the Nigeria–England game, the commentator stated, “you know that Nigeria is not going to run out of energy. They will keep running” (Bell Media, 2023). I thought to myself, “it’s unsustainable, all that sprinting; why would you say that?” In that game, I saw that Nigeria regularly had the best chances of scoring. To combat these instances of anti-Blackness, highlighting the skills of Black women footballers is important. Spain would not have enjoyed its success in the World Cup without the skills and goals of Salma Paralluelo. France, England, and Canada all had Black women among their best defenders: Wendie Renard, Jessica Carter, and Kadeisha Buchanan. From the left-back to right-back positions, defenders assumed pivotal roles on the football field. Confronting agile and versatile strikers while navigating the intense pressures of the game constitutes a crucial responsibility. Black women excelled in these roles, making significant contributions to the success of their respective squads. Those Black women footballers are strategic, creative, intelligent, and poised.

## **The Current Momentum of Girls and Women in Sports**

We know from the men's side of sports that when viewership and engagement with tournaments and teams are high, young people are more likely to enter the sport and remain engaged (Eime et al., 2013). The landscape of women and girls in sports is experiencing a notable surge in



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popularity, marked by significant advancements in addressing equity within this realm (Staurowsky et al., 2020). Notably, the NCAA women's basketball final garnered unprecedented viewership over the past year, with compelling narratives surrounding athletes such as Angel Reese and Caitlin Clark enriching the overall appeal of the game (Blasi, 2024). Further contributing to this momentum, was the ground-breaking inaugural WNBA exhibition game held in Canada (Hylton, 2023a), the successful staging of the Women's World Cup (WWC) (Ahmed, 2023), and the flourishing Professional Women's Hockey League in North America, where Toronto and Montreal games achieved a remarkable attendance record of 19,285, on par with the men's professional teams (Brown & Deonrain, 2024). In addition, high viewership was observed in events such as the three-point contest featuring Stephen Curry and Sabrina Ionescu, attracting 5.4 million viewers (Treacy, 2024), and the clash between rivals South Carolina and Louisiana State University, drawing 1.55 million viewers (Chavkin, 2024). The resounding sentiment that "Everyone Watches Women Sports" is not merely a proclamation but a shared acknowledgment among enthusiasts and supporters of girls and women in sports (Scheidler, & Wagstaff, 2018).

### **Black Girls' Unique Experiences**

While we celebrate the rise of women's sports globally, and its increasing appeal to mixed gender audiences across diverse geographies, we must also be realistic about the barriers still faced by many social groups. Black girls and young women are one such group that continuously faces barriers to enter and remain engaged in the sport (Arinze & McGarry, 2021; Gabay, 2013). The barriers include racism, socio-economic variables, access to teams where Black girls live, and a lack of representation at the level of coaching, refereeing, and team management (Bruening et al., 2005;



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Gabay, 2013; White, 2021). And yet, this is a moment where opportunities exist for youth serving organizations to capitalize on the heightened attention to and greater investment in women's sports. Thinking broadly, youth serving organizations could partner with sports organizations, including national and regional sports administration and policymaking bodies, to generate new pathways for Black girls and young women to become engaged (Rauscher & Cooky, 2015). Such pathways focus, of course, on the sport participation component but can also open doors to coaching, refereeing, sports management, and administration. The argument for such partnerships can be built around youth development which has always been at the core of youth serving organizations. Child and youth care and social work as professional practices have always included an emphasis on mentorship, relational engagements, advocacy, and ultimately generating new experiences for young people in which they might find new inspiration and ambition (Bisman, 2004; Garfat, 2012; Simard et al., 2014). For many young people, engagement in sport, either as athlete or as administrative leader, is remarkably high on the list of aspirations. It is for this reason that in many jurisdictions, schools are often associated with sports and sports teams, drawing on a pool of highly motivated students aspiring for careers that involve sports (Stout, 2023).

### **Strategies for Youth Serving Organizations in Championing Inclusion for Black Girls in Sports**

Youth serving organizations could take leadership roles in advocating for sport policies that aim to increase inclusion and support equity-focused initiatives. In some countries, including Canada, inclusion, and equity, particularly as it relates to girls, is a core element of development and public investment strategies. This is therefore an enormous opportunity for youth



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serving organizations to initiate dialogue that connects policy to the grassroots and opens opportunities for Black girls to engage.

“Soccer begins with the grassroots,” I told my interviewer on PBS’s *To the Contrary* (Hylton, 2023c). Football federations need to invest in underserved neighbourhoods, providing them with free and accessible access to football fields, quality coaching and mentorship programs. When Canada departed early from the WWC in 2023, captain Christine Sinclair stated in her post-game interview that it was a wakeup call for Canada, as, unlike other countries, Canada is not investing enough in youth football (Canadian Press, 2023). I agree with Sinclair’s statement. More programs need to be funded to focus on youth development. Football programs that are grassroots, and youth focused, are one of the ways in which a new generation of Black girls, one that is empowered and sees itself reflected in the sport, can emerge. Football federations are only one side of the equation. Youth serving agencies are another side; one that must commit to efforts to include sport as one of the many healing resources offered to young people.

Globally, football at the grassroots is often supported through global north contributions to social and economic development in the global south. Canada, for example, practices what it calls a ‘feminist foreign policy’ precisely to prioritize the development of girls and young women. Furthermore, the Canadian Sport Policy (CSP) is a national policy that identifies Canadian sport priorities and helps guide how federal, provincial, and territorial governments advance sport (Thibault & Harvey, 2013). Within this policy, in the section on gender equity, the federal government has set a target to achieve gender equity in sport by 2035 (Government of Canada, 2018). The CSP emphasizes increased participation, inclusivity, safety, and excellence in sports. Youth-Serving organizations, such as schools, community centers, and youth clubs, are often pivotal in implementing



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these goals by creating inclusive, safe, and supportive environments for Black girls to engage in football and sports (Powers et al., 2020). Another section of the CSP focuses on advocating for accessible sports programs for all youth, regardless of their socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, or physical ability. For Black girls, youth serving organizations can develop specific intersectional approaches to measurable goals that reflect the CSP's commitment to inclusion and accessibility to sport for all (Brown & Clark, 2023; Rauscher & Cooky, 2015).

Engagement at the community level will be an essential component of reaching this target, which, again, creates a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for youth-serving organizations to initiate partnerships to get Black girls involved at all levels of the sport. Black football stars serve as inspiration and incentive to get engaged. Barriers to entry serve as disappointment and disincentive to get engaged. Youth serving organizations have always operated at the threshold of positive incentives to make change with young people rather than for them, and indeed operate at a level that can address many of these barriers and facilitate access to these oft closed off spaces. This is the opportunity to collaborate with Black girls and fundamentally transform what for many young people is a world of opportunity and hope.

## **Conclusion**

This paper outlined some of my reflections on the 2023 Women's World Cup within Feminist Theorizing. My love of sports and football has opened my eyes to the global possibilities that sports and youth serving organizations can champion to support the inclusion of Black girls in sports to address many of the barriers and challenges they face entering and engaging in sports. Sports remain an integral part of human culture and socialization that brings people together. It is, therefore, well aligned with



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the values of social service organizations to address many of the barriers that exclude Black girls and young women from full participation in sport activities. Social service organizations that serve youth are uniquely positioned to engage with Black girls and young women more directly. They can lead the charge to advocate for policies that aim to increase inclusion and support equity-focused initiatives in sports. This can enhance not only their inclusion in sports but their overall well-being in society.

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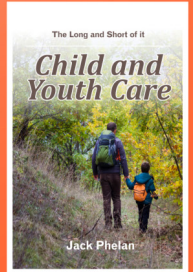
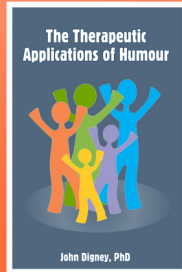
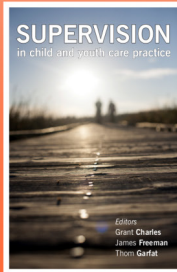
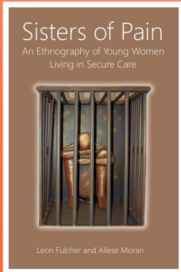
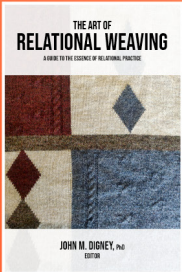
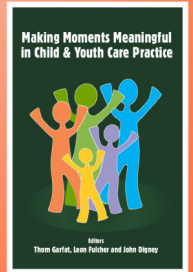
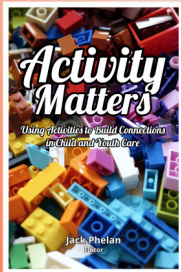
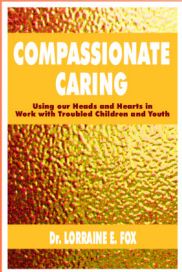
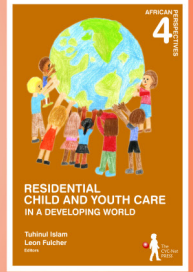
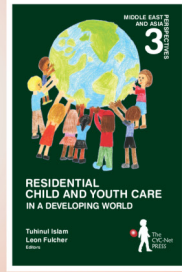
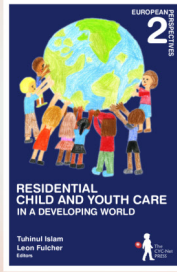
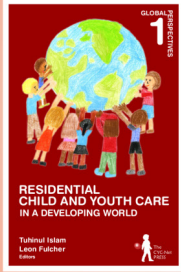
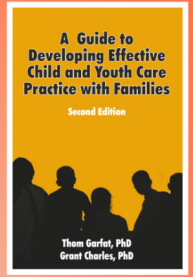
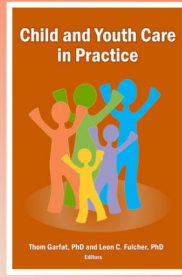
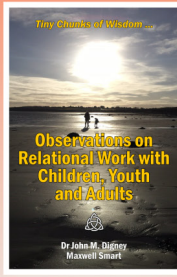
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# Purposeful Use of Activities

**Travis Sampson**

**F**or many years, those whose job or responsibility it is to support the development of young people have relied on behaviourist principles and interventions to support learning and change. I won't argue here that arranging external consequences is completely ineffective when it comes to influencing individual choices, learning, or development. As I have said to students in the classes I facilitate, "I love my job, and am internally motivated to do it well, but if they stopped paying me, you all wouldn't see me anymore." Rewards, punishments, and reinforcements of all kinds can most certainly offer opportunities for learning and create guardrails along the highway of healthy development. It is my philosophy, however, that when we overly rely on these types of interventions, we begin to create barriers in the formation of relationships (particularly the reinforcement of power dynamics), and, indeed, move farther and farther away from relational practice overall.

It can be difficult to shift away from our reliance on a behaviourist approach. Pavlov did get those dogs to salivate at the sound of a bell, after all. And Skinner did get those rats to repeat a desired behaviour with the right rewards and punishments put in place. There is validity to behaviourist



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approaches. I think, though, that more than these experiments, the comfort behaviourist approaches offer CYC-P and other caregivers, has created the greatest difficulty in shifting away from a reliance on them.

Operant conditioning as a tool to support learning and change is really quite simple and straightforward to implement. When young person does desirable thing 'x' they get desirable thing 'y.' When they do bad thing 'a' then we present them with punishment 'b.' As Phelan (2009) points out, new CYC-Ps are often experiencing self-doubt in relation to their competence and focus much of their energy on doing the safe (or correct) thing. A behaviourist approach, with its clearly identified, black and white responses to complex behaviours and choices, meets the developmental needs of a new worker. There is very little personal challenge as practitioners to reflect, examine context, or consider each individual young person's needs. We merely observe a behaviour or choice, go down our list of available consequences, and administer them as prescribed. Whether there is change or not, whether development is supported or not, we can report to our supervisor, and document in our logs that we have 'done our job.' But if we are engaging in relational practice, have we done our job? And what other tools are in the belt of a relational practitioner aside from our list of rewards and punishments?

One such tool is 'the purposeful use of activities' (Freeman, Fulcher, Garfat, Gharabaghi, 2018). When incorporating this characteristic into their practice, practitioners intentionally curate a specific experience for a young person that serves to address an unmet need, support learning, or offers them a chance to reflect on themselves and/or those they might share a relationship with (Freeman, Fulcher, Garfat, Gharabaghi, 2018). I think of a young person I worked with who was transitioning into a new school. They were feeling unsafe in that process and verbalizing that they would not ever set foot in this new building. Our team at the time, purposefully planned a



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game of floor hockey with a staff member the young person knew and trusted, the young person's principal, and their assigned 1-1 student support staff member. This game took place in the gym of the new school, and after a tour of the building. We all, as a staff team, avoided relying on a sticker chart and a list of punitive consequences, recognized the unmet need for safety, and belonging, and planned some purposeful activities that would meet this need. And it worked.

The story you are about to read is similar to the one I've just summarized above. It is about an adolescent teen looking to meet some fairly typical developmental needs (belonging amongst same-age peers, and increasing independence) and one staff team's commitment to making intentional choices to plan and facilitate activities that would meet these needs, while also encouraging choices that would support healthy development. It is a story about a couple of specific activities, that were used to serve one or two particular purposes, but I encourage you to recognize that any activity can serve any purpose if you are thoughtful and intentional about the way you arrange the experience.

### **Back and Forth**

"Harsh, eh!" My cousin DJ cackled while I coughed and hacked through tear filled and must-have-been-reddening eyes. It was times like this I missed living in Ottawa. Down South, it was so much easier to get a real pipe and some weed that wasn't so harsh. 10 dollars a gram, too. But I was back up North now. Back home. It was good to be closer to my sister and my cousins, but toking out of a dented Pepsi can with some holes poked in it, well, there were better ways to get stoned.

"Fucking-" I started, but I interrupted myself with another coughing fit.



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DJ's laughter renewed with increased intensity. "Deadly weed, ah," he stated.

My mouth filled with saliva and I gathered it into a wad to spit out at my feet. I let it fall out of my mouth, more than I spit it out. It froze the second it hit the hard, crunchy ice we were standing on. Some of it clung to my lip and dribbled down my chin. I wiped at my mouth and face with the back of my parka's sleeve, hocked, and spit again.

DJ smacked me on the back. "You good?"

"It's good," I managed to force out through my bone-dry throat after one more spit to clear my mouth. I squeezed my eyes together and rubbed my palms into them to get rid of the last of the tears. "Aaaaaahck," I said.

"Really could munch out," DJ stated before he lit his torch lighter and hauled on what was left of the weed sitting in the can-pipe's bowl. "Got any cash on you?" he asked, lungs full of smoke.

I scrunched my nose and furrowed my brow. "Nah," I told him.

"My neither," DJ said. "Pay day tomorrow." He blew the ashes out of the can, kneeled down and zipped the bent up and scorched can into the front pocket of his backpack.

"Could go back to the group home," I suggested while DJ stood up and threw his backpack around his shoulders again.

"Those Qallunaat don't care if you come back baked?"

I shrugged at DJ's question. "Little bit. Long as we don't act crazy, and Conan or Wesley can't tell, they won't be too grouchy. If you want to stay, we'll have to do program though."

"What's program tonight?"

I explained group home language to DJ when I first moved back home, so he knew 'program' was some activity or game or something staff planned for us every night after supper. "What day's it again?" I asked. I'd skipped



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school every day so far this week. It was always harder to keep track when I did that.

DJ pulled out his phone. I guess skipping school had the same effect on him. “Wednesday,” he said, his face glowing blue from the light of the phone screen.

“Ping pong and popcorn night,” I told him.

“Deadly!” DJ exclaimed while he slid his phone back into the pocket of his jeans. “Got to get revenge on you from last week,” he said with a sharp poke in my chest.

“Not even,” I teased him with a shove into his shoulder.

DJ chuckled as he recovered from a stumble backwards. “They won’t care if I come again this week?”

I scrunched my face again. “Nah. We always got tons of food, and they’re always bugging me to stay in, telling me to invite a friend over.”

“S’go then,” DJ said starting off in the direction of the group home.

We walked in silence with only the sound of the hard ice crunching under our kamiks until we got to the side steps of the big house I lived in with two Qallunaat and two other little kids. I stopped DJ with an arm across his chest when we got to the bottom of the steel-grate stairs and deck around the side of the house. “Leave your backpack,” I told him. “Under the stairs, right there,” I directed him.

DJ scrunched his nose at me. “What the fuck, man?”

“You put the smoke-can in there,” I told him. “Really stinks.”

“Stinks?” he repeated.

I raised my eyebrows. “Francis will smell that before we leave the mudroom. He’ll kick you out.” I was speaking from experience. I had brought a used smoke-can home last month. Francis smelled it before I had my parka hung up on the wall.

“Not even,” DJ told me. “We dumped the weed. It’s good, Hiktok.”



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Smelling like weed wasn't something DJ ever had to worry about at his place. It pissed me off for a second that it *was* something I had to worry about. Then I thought about Conan and Wesley and how they always wanted to follow me around and copy me. "Doesn't matter we dumped it, the ash and shit still reeks, man."

DJ looked at me for a second in silence. I think he was trying to read whether I was fucking with him or not. He realized I wasn't, shrugged, slid the backpack off his shoulders and chucked it under the deck. "You owe me a gram if someone steals it," he warned me as we stomped up the stairs. The vibrations of the steel grating echoed into the dark, early evening air as we stopped in front of the locked steel door to get in.

I lifted a fist and knocked hard and fast until I saw that the racket I was making brought Francis out of the office, and around the corner to let us in.

\* \* \*

*6:27pm.*

I looked up from my phone after making note of the time and slid it back into my pocket.

Karla finished scooping some powdered soap into the dishwasher and slammed it shut. "It's getting late," she stated plainly, although I picked up on the insinuation.

"Yeah," I said. "We might as well pack up the leftovers."

Neither of us wanted to say it out loud, but it looked like Hiktok wasn't going to be back for supper, and when he wasn't home for supper, he wasn't usually home for curfew either. It was looking like another AWOL incident report, another late night, and probably another day of missed school in the morning.



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"I really thought we were on to something the last couple weeks," I said, bending over at a corner cupboard to start gathering up some plastic dishes for the left-over char chowder.

"Yeah," Karla agreed. "Me, too."

I reached deep into the cupboard to find the covers to match the containers I had put on the counter. "Him and DJ were so into it last week. I just thought for sure..."

"Yeah," Karla agreed again, walking the large serving pot full of the char chowder into the kitchen. "Me too."

Just then the phone started ringing from the office. Karla's hands were still full of the oversized pot. "I got it," I told her, pulling my keys out of my pocket as I headed towards the staff office to answer the phone.

I dropped into the high-backed, worn and wheeled chair at our staff desk, kicked the door closed from there, and picked up the phone.

"Umingmak Group Home," I tried to say with some zest into the receiver. "Francis speaking."

"Hello, Francis," responded a voice. I didn't have to wonder who the owner of it was.

"Hi, Bernice," I said.

"I need to talk to Dwayne," she said.

"Sorry," I said, "Who?" I knew who.

An audible sigh. "Dwayne, Francis. Hiktok. I need to talk to him."

"Ohhhhh," I stretched the word out for effect. "Hiktok. Right."

"Do we have to do that *every* time, Francis?"

"I was just confused, Bernice," I said. I wasn't. "We never call him that," I added.

"It's his *real* name, Francis."

"According to who?" I asked. There was a small pause in which Bernice didn't respond. "Not him," I added.



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Another moment of silence I let hang.

"It's in all his legal documentation," Bernice countered with questionable enthusiasm.

"Is this conversation legal documentation, Bernice?"

"It could be," she told me firmly.

I knew when to quit, and so I did. "Hiktok isn't here right now. He didn't come home after school."

"He didn't go to school," Bernice stated.

"He did not," I agreed. "The school called us. They called Janessa, too. Her and I were talking at lunch." Janessa was Hiktok's older sister who lived in town. "She wants Hiktok to call her as soon as he gets home, no matter what time."

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"This is a pattern now," Bernice identified. "A bad one."

"It is," I agreed.

"So, what's the group home doing about it?"

I was glad for Karla in that moment, and the debriefing of things we had been engaging in together all day. To be frank, it was this question we were preparing for. "Couple of things," I started, "if the missed school keeps up, we talked with his teachers about work packages being sent home, and the expectation would be he does them before getting any privileges around the house--"

"Privileges?" Bernice cut in.

"Video games."

"OK," Bernice said almost to herself in a way that made me think she was taking notes. I guess this conversation *was* going to be legal documentation.

"We also noticed, he almost always comes home at supper on Friday nights, and stays in. Fridays we do pizza, bake a dessert, then movie night and popcorn. He usually invites DJ over and aside from a smoke or two, they both stay in until curfew. DJ goes home after that, and Hiktok goes to bed."

I paused there, but Bernice said nothing.

"So," I went on, "we figured we'd try to schedule more nights at the house that are appealing to him. Last two weeks, we did ping pong. The first week we just set up the net and messed around, but last week we had a little tournament. Anyway, he was in all night both nights."

"Ok. And what night are you doing ping pong?"

"Wednesdays," I said confidently.

"Right," Bernice said. "So, not going so well tonight then."

"No," I conceded.



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There was another pause. Bernice was definitely taking notes. “Anything else?”

There was. “Janessa and I talked about her scheduling another day of the week for Hiktok to visit her and the kids for supper and to play cards until curfew. The visits are happening right now, obviously, but not on a schedule and not weekly. We figure, give him another night, every week, with a plan to do something he likes until curfew, and maybe it’ll be another night he’s in bed at a decent hour.”

Silence, for more note taking. “Alright. And what about consequences?” Bernice asked about ‘consequences,’ but she meant ‘punishments.’

“Like...” I let the word hang.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Bernice started, “maybe he doesn’t get his allowance if he keeps going AWOL.”

“Part of allowance is tied to his responsibility to go to school,” I assured her. “And school attendance is part of earning privileges like access to the house PS4. But if Hiktok does his chores and chooses to do extra ones to support the house, he will earn some allowance. It’s not connected to curfew.”

Bernice sighed.

“We’ve talked about consequences, and our philosophy in how we use and talk about them at Umingmak, Bernice.”

“We have,” she said and stayed quiet for a moment. “Behaviourism has been around since Pavlov and Skinner, Francis. It isn’t useless.”

“Not useless,” I agreed. “But they did gather their evidence from dogs and mice.”

“Rats,” Bernice corrected me. “Skinner used rats.”

I conceded the vermin related victory. “Right. Either way, Hiktok has more complex needs than a dog or rat.”



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Before Bernice could respond, I heard the vibration of heavy footsteps on the grated steel steps to our porch, followed by loud and rapid banging on the door.

“Hold on,” I exclaimed. “Hiktok just got home!” I placed the receiver on the desk and darted out of the office to let him in.

\* \* \*

“I was wondering if you boys were going to be back in time for the tournament this week,” Francis said to us as we kicked off our kamiks in the porch.

“Had to come back for revenge this week,” DJ told him. “Going to get you and Hiktok this time.”

Francis grinned at us both, but his grin disappeared as he took a breath in through his nose. “Smells like you fellas had a little toke before coming back, too,” he said. “DJ, if you’re going to stay, you both need to go wash the stink off your hands.”

“It’s good, Francis,” DJ assured him. “Chillax.” Then he headed for the bathroom on the main level that we mostly used for guests.

Francis then turned to me. “You know the deal, dude. If DJ being here after you guys toked becomes an issue with Conan and Wesley, he’s gotta go.”

I raised my eyebrows silently and undid my parka to hang it up.

“Glad you came back tonight,” Francis added. “Bernice is on the phone right now; she wants to talk to you.”

I rolled my eyes. “Really grouchy,” I said. “Tell her I’m busy.”

“I can tell her you don’t want to talk to her, man. But I told you before and I’ll say it again, life will be easier if you get along with Bernice.”



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Francis was right about one thing; he had definitely said that to me before. "Fine," I told him, "I'll talk to her."

"A wise choice," he said. "She's on the phone right now, head to the living room and I'll lock the door so you can have a quiet space to chat. Oh, and I was talking to Janessa earlier. She said to call her as soon as you get home. She also said if you don't call, I should text her and she will come over."

I didn't respond to that.

"The school called her, too," Francis added, as if I hadn't already put that together.

"Nosy teachers," I said, heading into the living room and dropping onto the puffy leather chair in front of the TV.

Francis didn't say anything else, but grabbed the portable phone from the office and handed it to me. He left the room and closed the door.

"Yeah," I said into the receiver.

"Hi, Dwayne," Bernice said. "How are you?"

"Good," was all I told her.

"You didn't go to school today," she stated, as if I didn't already know that.

I was only silent in response.

"You know school is an expectation, Dwayne. Everyone expects that you are attending. Me, the group home, your sister."

"Yeah," I said.

Bernice was quiet for a minute, waiting for me to add something, I guess. I didn't add anything though.

"You've been asking me for approval to get a cell phone. It's not going to happen if you aren't meeting basic expectations."

"OK," I said.

Another pause. "OK," Bernice said back.



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"That it?" I asked her. "I have to set up ping pong."

"Yes, Dwayne. That's it. I'll see you next week for our meeting."

I hung up the phone without saying goodbye and stared at it for a minute. *Better get this next part over with*, I thought to myself before dialing my sister's number.

"Hiktok?" her voice asked after one ring.

"Yeah," I said.

"You're home early tonight," she observed.

"Ping pong tonight," I responded. "Me and DJ wanted to play."

"Good," she said. "Your teacher called me again today, didn't go to school all week so far. Why not?"

"Didn't feel like it," I said.

"Not good enough, Hiktok. You can't live at the group home forever; you need your grade 12. Helps you get a better job, could even go to college."

"You sound like group home staff," I told her. "Liked it better when you were warning me about trusting the Qallunaat."

She laughed. "We always need to be careful of white people. But on school, and with these two exact white people, Francis and Karla, I am on the same page."

I didn't say anything.

"Speaking of those white people, we were all talking at lunch today. I was thinking every Tuesday, *after school*," she paused for effect at the words 'after school,' "you could come over here, help me with supper and bedtime with the kids, then you, me, and John could play cards until you go back to the group home for curfew. John can take you back on the snow machine since it'll be late."

"Every Tuesday?" I asked.

"Yeah," she said. "Sound good?"

"Sounds good," I said, and it actually did sound good.



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“Good,” Janessa said with finality. “OK. I need to get these kids in bed. Eekee is wired. School tomorrow,” she added sternly. “*And* the rest of the week.”

“Yeah, yeah, sis,” I assured her. “Night.”

“Love you.”

“You too,” I told her before hanging up the phone.

I got up and left the living room to bring the phone back to Francis. When I rounded the corner into the kitchen, I found DJ hunched over a huge bowl of char chowder. He was shoveling it into his mouth with a spoon he held in one hand and clutching a big piece of bannock in the other. White, creamy liquid was dripping down his chin, he grinned at me. “Francis is heating you up a bowl,” he told me. “Come. Sit. It’s deadly!”

\* \* \*

*10:56pm.*

I noted the time in the bottom right corner of the monitor as I was finishing up logs on the office computer. I stopped what I was doing to admire my championship belt that was sitting on the desk to my left. DJ and Hiktok, before the tournament, decided to make a belt out of cardboard.

Umingmak Group Home was now the site of the Arctic Ping Pong Championship, or, the APPC as the belt stated. We had gone from messing around with the net, to an actual tournament, to our own league in the last 3 weeks. DJ and Hiktok had even made plans for a tournament every Monday evening in addition to the Wednesdays we had scheduled. It sounded, too, like they would be inviting another friend or two from class to join in. It was looking like the original purpose that Karla and I had come up with was taking on a life of its own.



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A knock on the glass window of the office door interrupted my self-congratulatory train of thought. Hiktok and DJ were standing there now. They had their parkas on, and Hiktok made a pointing gesture at the door, then waved to me.

I jumped out of my chair and shot out of the office. “Where you headed?” I tried to ask casually.

Hiktok and DJ laughed at me.

“Chillax, Francis. Just going for a smoke,” Hiktok told me. “Be right back.”

The two boys left the building through the door in the porch, stomped down the stairs, and walked exactly 3 inches off property. I watched from the window as they had a smoke, chatted about this, that, and the other thing, and, eventually, stomped out their glowing cigarette butts. DJ said one last thing to Hiktok, and Hiktok shook his head before turning back to the house. I pushed open the door to let him in.

“Just staring at us,” he teased me. “Really creepy.”

I laughed. “Just making sure you weren’t taking off again.”



Hiktok scrunched his nose and furrowed his eyebrows. "Getting late," he said. He kicked off his kamiks, hung up his parka and started marching up the stairs to his bedroom. He poked his head back down the stairs after disappearing. "Wake me up at 7:30 tomorrow, eh," he said. "I want to take a shower before school."

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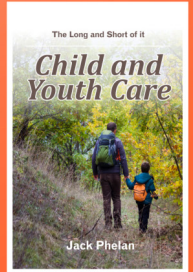
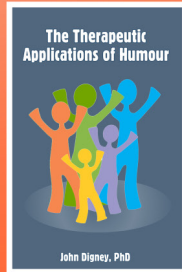
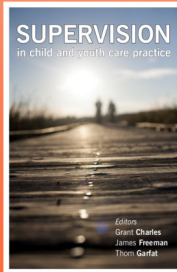
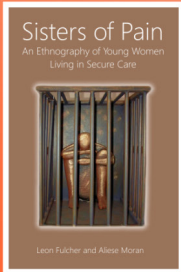
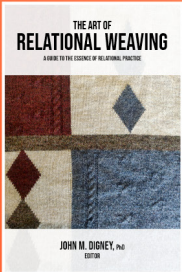
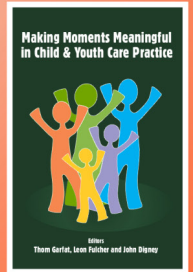
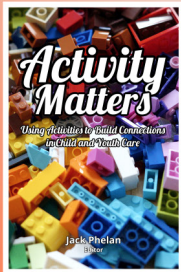
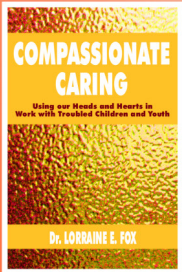
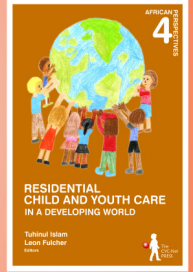
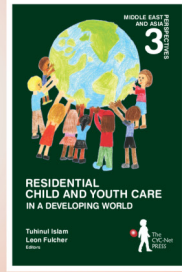
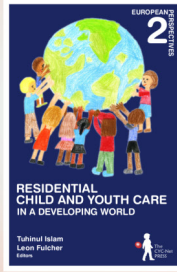
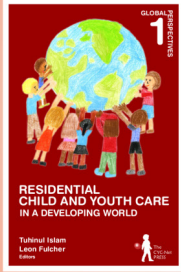
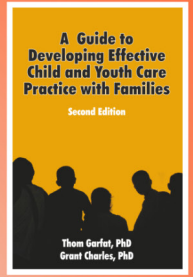
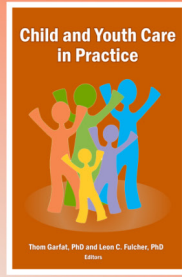
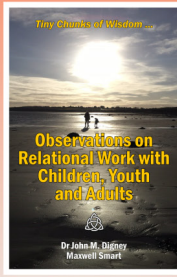


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# Mountains of Grievances and Oceans of Love: A Female Care Leaver's Tale

**Tuhinul Islam**

**R**ecently, I received a WhatsApp message from an unknown number that read, "I am so upset with you and have a mountain of grievances against you in my heart. How can people called 'father' forget their daughter like this???" (Assalamu alaikum sir, Apni kemn asen, Apnar opor amr mone akta pahar soman oviman jome ase. Baba namer manus gulo ai vabe tar konna k vule jai???)."

I didn't recognise the number, so I called it. From the other end, the first sentence after greetings was, "Why didn't you keep in contact with us for all these years? I have searched for you many times, but no one could give me your contact details. Sohagi Apa (another care leaver - 'Apa' means sister and is a respectful way to address an older female) told me you spoke to her a few days ago and asked about me. She gave me your phone number. Once I got your number, I couldn't wait to reconnect with you. How are you, Abbu (Dad)?" She asked all these very quickly, her voice upset and



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emotional. She cried. She is Nargis, a young female care leaver around 35 years of age, who grew up in our children's Home where I used to work.

Nargis and seven other girls were brought to our children's Home from an organisation located near the largest brothel in the country, which had over 5000 sex workers. Their shelter home was approximately 100 miles away from our Home. The CEO of that organisation requested our help, knowing we provided better support for the children of sex workers. After communication, background checks, and consent from the girls and their guardians, they were brought to our Home. They arrived at our Home at ages 10 to 12.

We found Nargis to be a very cheerful, happy, and supportive girl in her personal life. While she wasn't exceptional academically, her other skills were impressive. She resembled a famous television actress in our country, so the children at the Home started calling her by the actress's name. After they settled in, all seven girls brought their siblings, including Nargis's younger brother, to the children's Home.

Nargis spent over ten years in the children's Home and left after marrying Robiul, who also grew up there. A few years ago, we hired Robiul as an ambulance driver at our hospital. The organisation hosted a grand wedding for Nargis and Robiul, and upon leaving the Home, both received financial, emotional, and security support from the organisation to start their new lives. You can find part of Robiul's story here (Beginning to Work with Sex Workers and their Children: A Personal Reflection. *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice*, Vol. 28 Issue 2, p65.)

Nargis and Robiul both participated in my PhD research. (Read more in "Gratitude: A Mantra for Thriving - A Young Care Leaver Story" <https://cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cyconline-jul2024-islam.html> ).



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Nargis and I talked about many things, but mostly about our time at the Home, sharing good and not-so-good memories. We talked about how the children were taken care of, the values instilled in them, the caregivers, love and affection, and structured programmes that helped foster a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood among the children. She also talked about a principal who was a real hero in creating a positive environment.

During a surprise monitoring visit to the Home, I witnessed the children sitting in the playground, joyfully sharing small slices of mangoes. Despite the limited quantity, everyone willingly participated, and no one expressed dissatisfaction with the size of the slices.

Upon further inquiry, I learned that the children had been collecting mangoes that had fallen from the trees and storing them in the principal's office. They were saving the mangoes so that they could be distributed equitably among all the children. This was the first batch of mangoes for the season, and as the mangoes on the trees were not yet ripe, the children refrained from picking them. Although the Home would typically purchase mangoes for the children during the season, the gesture of sharing a small slice with others was particularly touching to me. It was a testament to the children's selflessness and concern for one another.

In the principal's absence, I inquired with the teachers about the inspiration behind the children's actions, and they attributed it to the positive example set by the principal. The children now look up to him, and the Home is more organised because of his influence.

Nargis also spoke about a caring female teacher who treated them like their mothers. She often overlooked their silly mistakes and refrained from complaining to the principal, so they did not get caught, punished, scolded, or reminded. "She seemed to understand our feelings and age," Nargis added.



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Nargis lives near the capital city and is happy with her husband and two daughters, aged seven and three. She is a homemaker, and her husband, Robiul, is a rental car driver and earns a decent income. Nargis said she is saving money for her daughters' future studies because education is very expensive, especially when getting admission to a good school.

However, they had a very hard life for three years, and during that time, she was desperately looking for my contact number. Robiul had been falsely accused of a murder and drug-selling case. To avoid arrest, police torture, and being put in jail, Robiul left his job and went into hiding to prepare to prove his innocence in the case. Nargis said Robiul didn't even know who had filed the case against him and why. She was very upset with the CEO, as, according to her, they didn't receive enough emotional, mental, financial, and legal support they needed to prove their innocence.

In Robiul's case, the Children's Home was under police scrutiny, and the law enforcement agency unlawfully harassed the Home and parent organisation officials and the children to find Robiul. Due to excessive pressure from the police, as a strategy the CEO needed to reduce contact with Nargis, which affected them greatly. In a conversation with Nargis, the CEO even agitatedly told her that it seemed they had made a mistake in rescuing them from the brothel and providing love, affection, and care. The CEO expressed concern that all Home children and the organisation were in danger due to Robiul's actions, and it seemed they had not changed, still relating to the culture of killing, human trafficking, and drug trafficking. After this incident, Nargis stopped communicating with the CEOs for seven years. Eventually, after years of fighting, the allegations were proved false, but they had to go through a very hard time socially, physically, mentally, spiritually, and financially.

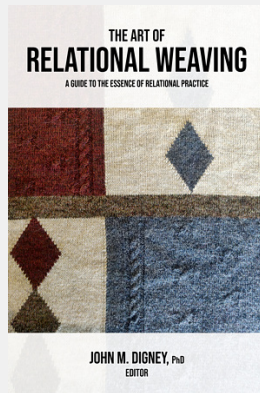


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Nargis mentioned that they received very little support from anyone during their difficult times after the CEO reduced his contact with them. “At that time, I sought your help, guidance, and direction to overcome that critical situation. I remember how you adjusted the policy to prevent Robiul and Johnny from being expelled from the home and how you handled Sonia's police case. We respected you because you were always on the right side without judging us. If we were wrong, you would protect us first and then scold us, just like a parent would. During our conversation, she became very emotional and sometimes addressed me as "Abbu" (dad), which was a bit unexpected but not surprising, since I always used to refer to all girls as my daughters and all boys as my sons when I was with them.”

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Nargis's brother left home a few years ago after completing his master's degree. The organisation has given him a job as a poverty alleviation assistant manager. As the elder sister, Nargis was tasked with organising everything for her brother's marriage. Before her brother's marriage, she thought it would be wise to consult the CEO about her brother's wedding plan. She wanted to express their gratitude to the CEO for the support and care she and her brother, husband, and other children received and to seek his blessings.

After seven years of silence and initial hesitation, Nargis called the CEO and became emotional when she heard his voice. The CEO was delighted to hear from her and invited her to visit. Nargis, her two daughters, and her husband went to meet the CEO. Nargis described the emotional moment when the CEO stood up from his chair to hug her and her daughters, and they all cried. Her daughters were confused and asked why they were crying.

As a father figure, the CEO regretted not being there for them directly at the critical time and questioned why Nargis hadn't brought her daughters to meet him sooner. Nargis was moved by the CEO's display of love and care, and she found herself withdrawing the complaints against him from the past. The CEO explained to her why he could not support them directly as he had to prioritise the children in the Home and the organisation's well-being as the founder and father of many. However, Nargis realised that she had received indirect support from the organisation, which was orchestrated by the CEO himself. She acknowledged that she may not have fully understood the situation at the time.

Nargis and her kids had a good time with the CEO and shared the news of her brother's marriage. The CEO was very happy and arranged a wedding ceremony at the children's Home. A significant amount of money was spent, just like that spent by the children's parents.



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I learned a lot from her about other care leavers – how they're doing, who is doing well and struggling, and shared some good memories. She also gave me the contact details of some care leavers and the hero principal who left the children's Home a few years ago. She also sent me pictures of her daughters and her brother's wedding.

Nargis mentioned that the CEO's health has declined as he ages. He recently had bypass surgery and has been experiencing hearing problems. She asked me to speak to the CEO, and I agreed.

I assured her that when I visit the country, I will make sure to visit her.

The last thing she said to me was, "Abbu (Dad), I didn't realise I would be out of touch with you for so long. Now that we're connected, we must ensure we never lose touch again."

After receiving the contact details from Nargis, I called two young men. One is working as a salesman in Saudi Arabia, and the other is in his home country, running a furniture-making and selling business after completing his master's in sociology. He married a girl from the children's Home who is now working in the organisation as a manager of the poverty alleviation programme. I will gradually share their stories with you.

Amid negative stories about residential child and youth care practices, Nargis's story is a breath of fresh air. There are thousands of positive stories in every country and society, like Nargis's, but they are rarely told by the media, NGOs, or researchers who advocate aggressive so-called de-institutionalization and claim to be experts in child and youth care.

In a country where children like Nargis face significant stigma and discrimination due to their birth identity, they are at risk of various forms of abuse and exploitation. We have made considerable progress by providing these children with the hope and support they need to thrive, ensuring their safety and reintegration into society through employment, marriages, and other opportunities after leaving care. These children receive better support



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than their peers raised by their parents, particularly in securing jobs and social reintegration, in a nation where approximately 2.59 million people were unemployed in the first quarter of 2024. Securing employment is challenging due to intense competition and corruption.

Currently, students in this country are protesting the discriminatory and unfair quota system for government jobs, which has escalated significantly, leading to widespread unrest and violence, leading to over 300 deaths and thousands of injuries.

On a limited scale, this one organisation has cared for at least these 3000 children, and thousands are benefitting from other child and youth care practices around the country.

Some advocates in the West and their allies in the Majority world focus solely on promoting the so-called de-institutionalisation of residential child and youth care through activities like writing, policy development, and advocacy. However, this may not always be in the best interest of children and young people in the Majority world. Instead, it could involve imposing Western ideas and disrupting local cultures, values, and religions, all in the name of creating job opportunities for themselves.

Howard Bath recently presented a paper titled 'Unexpected Re-emergence of Residential Care in Australia' at the Sydney Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) conference. He highlighted the increasing use of residential care over the past three decades, discussing challenges such as declining provisions from government departments and issues with reliance on small group units. Bath emphasised that reducing residential care to cut costs fails to address the ongoing needs of young people. Ainsworth and his colleagues had similarly noted this issue nearly 20 years ago in their paper 'A dream come true – no more residential care. A corrective note'.



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Additionally, the belief that foster and family care are superior to residential care lacks solid evidence. There is no conclusive proof that foster care produces better outcomes than institutional care.

Reflecting on my conversation with Nargis, I couldn't help but consider the perceived emotional differences between girls and boys. Her demeanour reminded me of a daughter speaking to her father, hence the term "daddy's girls." It was heartwarming to hear her affectionately call me "Abbu" with such love and affection. Nargis expressed her gratitude for the support, love, and affection she received from the teachers, CEO, me, and the children during and after her Home life. Initially, due to her hurt feelings, she considered not seeking advice from the CEO about her brother's marriage. However, she broke her silence to mend their relationship, still respecting him as her guardian, which ultimately resulted in a fantastic outcome.

Despite most Western literature and charities often blaming residential care for weakening family bonds and leading to poor educational and health outcomes for children, Nargis's experiences show that residential childcare can benefit many underprivileged children and young people. This challenges the Western notion of imposing their ideals on the Majority world. The West needs to start believing that the Majority world has much to offer, resetting the developed world's child and youth care systems and practices. Therefore, it is crucial for the West to conduct more comparative research among and between developed and developing countries led by the developing countries' academics and practitioners before they preach and impose their own idealism on the Majority world.

Nargis's story (along with many others) is a testament to the positive impact of residential care, highlighting the need for the West to reconsider their perspective and embrace insights from different cultures and experiences.



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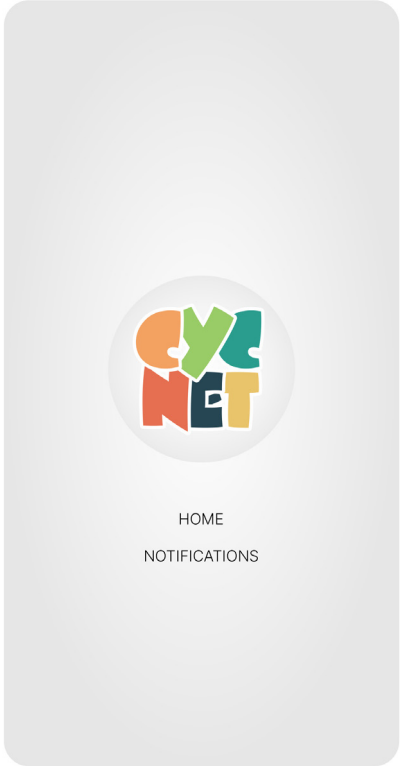
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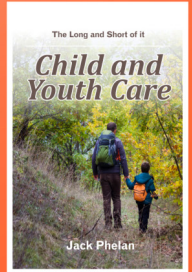
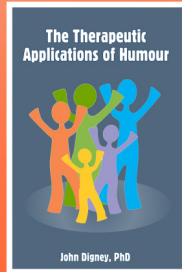
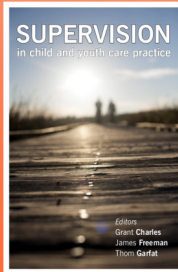
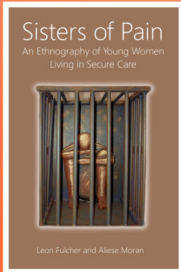
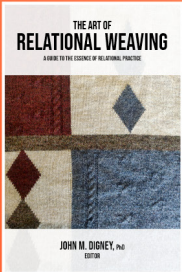
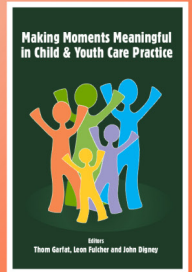
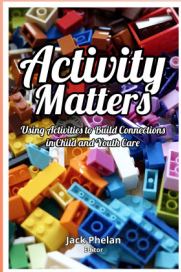
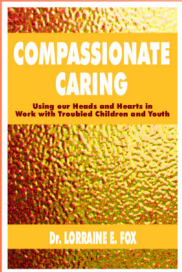
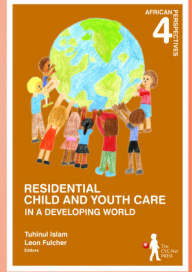
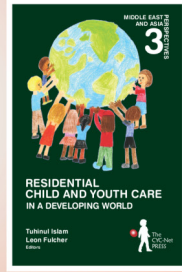
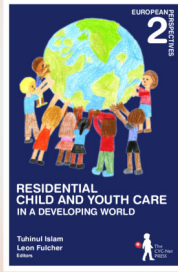
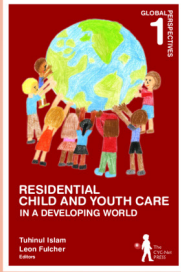
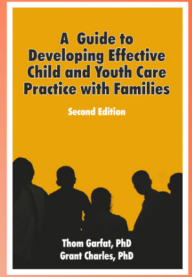
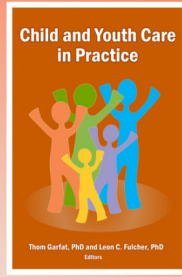
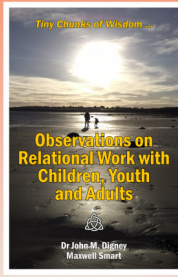
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# Male Role Models?

**Hans Skott-Myhre**

The idea and practice of role models remains commonplace as an intervention in CYC. The belief that adults have something to offer young people through a demonstration of a competent performance of adulthood remains largely uncontested. The professional consensus seems to be that we as adults know how to live and that we can share our wisdom by modeling what a successful adult looks like so that young people can emulate what they see and become successful as well. It strikes me that there are quite a lot of unexamined and at least marginally dubious assumptions in the way we have formulated this model of care. The issue for me is the way in which definitions that have been seriously contested and questioned in the drive towards greater equity and justice, seem to be accepted as simply common sense when we get to the practice of adult role models. I would argue that it is worth taking a moment and digging a little deeper into what we mean by adult role model and the ways this effects CYC practice.

Let's begin with what I would consider the quite loaded term *adult*. For many of us this may seem to be an obvious designation of a mature human being, but I would suggest that everything associated with the term is quite problematic. To begin with we would have to ask what we mean by mature. We could read this as a certain level of biological development. Certainly, this is the implication when we refer to frontal lobe development as a key indicator of the capacity to make mature decisions. But is that really any



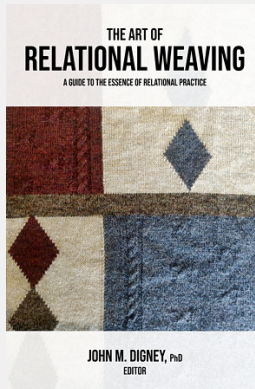
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kind of universal indicator? Certainly, many of us have full frontal lobe development by age 25, but does this guarantee that all people with this level of neurological development will act as the kind of adults we want as role models? Probably not.

So, then what do we mean by adult in the context of an adult role model? Do we mean people who have settled into successful careers and can role model business acumen? If so, why is this something to which we would want young people to aspire? Is it simply that we want young people to be able to make money and support themselves? Is this a worthwhile goal if the world of business success sometimes requires taking advantage of others in order to make a profit? Do we mean to suggest to young people that maturity is the ability to win at the cost of others losing?

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For me, these kinds of ethical questions are not asked often enough. When we refer to being a mature adult, I am concerned that what we really mean is someone thoroughly assimilated into mainstream capitalist culture. A respectable member of the community who can introduce young people into networks of privilege that might assure their induction into the hierarchies of business success. And at some level this could seem to make sense. But it also masks a not so subtle critique of anyone is less “successful,” less connected, less assimilated, and less business oriented.

Does this mean that I am suggesting that the young people we engage in our work should simply be left to live in poverty or to struggle to make ends meet? Of course not. What I am concerned about is equating adulthood or maturity with financial success. We know that there are structural barriers in this society that will make it nearly impossible for many of the young people we work with to escape a lifelong struggle with fiscal precarity. The intersectional coordinates of race, gender, and class profoundly and differentially impact these young people. For them, the idea that being successful means making money belies the statistical actuality that many of them will encounter societal barriers that will constitute a lifelong struggle for survival. When we role model business success as a significant variable in being a successful human being we may well be setting young people up for a long-term sense of failure and inferiority.

To honor the struggle to fight back against a system that marginalizes and disenfranchises the poor would offer a different version of successful adulthood. To acknowledge the social necessity of a life dedicated to building community and networks of care that finds avenues that refuse racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia, could offer a different kind of role modeling. A kind of role modeling that is collective and focuses on the “we” rather than highlighting the qualities of the “I” who has managed to assimilate enough to make money. This kind of role modeling goes beyond



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adult modeling into the kind of collaborative struggle that has the capacity to change the context and not just a few individuals who can overcome their circumstance.

The final issue I have with “adult” role models is that adults no longer understand the world as it has evolved in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I have made this point in many ways in this column, but it is particularly pertinent in the case of adult role models. Any model that adults offer young people today is already obsolete and, in some sense, nearly dangerous. Obsolete in the sense that the world that produced the role model is already dead and gone. The world of contemporary adults no longer exists, although we all continue to pretend nothing has substantively changed. But young people know this is not true. The world is radically different and becoming more so daily. In terms of demonstrating social competence in life skills, adults have little to offer in a world in which the skills necessary to negotiate life are shifting and changing dramatically. As adults, perhaps it would benefit us to learn from young people about the world as it is emerging rather than trying to teach them about a world that no longer exists.



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All of which is to say that role modeling is both complex and contentious in ways that may not be immediately obvious. For example, in what we have looked at so far regarding traditional models of adult role models there are imbedded social constructs that support a status quo that perpetuates systems of oppression, marginalization, and disenfranchisement. These would include a range of colonial constructs including, individualism, class constructs, mythologies that appear to erase hierarchies of race, gender, class, and heterosexism, the valuation of self-discipline, private property, the value system of global capitalism, and colonial psychological constructs of developmental hierarchy. Unless we take the time to tease these out of the discourses that form and shape our work, we will inadvertently perpetuate the very system that has placed young people in harm's way.

This gets even more complex and troubling when we examine the ways that gender plays out in the practices of role modeling. Gender based role modeling has also become fairly mainstream, particularly in relation to what has become known as the “war on boys.” This discourse, which argues that our society is neglecting boys and leaving them to languish while girls achieve ever greater markers of accomplishment, is riddled with suggestions of inherent male privilege. In this sense it is not unlike the White supremacist replacement discourses that claim that immigrants of color will erase and displace dominant white populations in Europe and the United States.

In this case the argument is that girls are erasing boys from social achievement. In both cases, there is no factual evidence that immigrants of color or girls are erasing anyone. Is their increased inclusion in society changing the parameters of social, political and economic life? Without a doubt. But are these changes in any way a threat to equitable relations between those designated white or male? To answer that question, we would have to assume that equitable relations is the goal. But the truth is



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that it is not equitable relations that are sought in replacement theory or the war in boys. What is really at stake is the continuance of white male privilege.

If we look at the actual evidence, middle- and upper-class white men and boys are continuing to dominate the social landscape. Women and girls still struggle to achieve overall equity, although they are finally beginning to make some headway which seems to be causing some degree of panic about elite boys losing their edge. I note elite white men and boys because it is boys of color and working-class boys who seem to be falling behind. The response to the complex and difficult social problems facing boys without the advantages of class and race privilege has been the introduction of “positive male role models.”

But as Ana Tarrant and her colleagues (2015) point out, “Existing research in educational and welfare settings indicates that the ‘commonsense’ assumption that there is a need for more positive male role models does not capture the complexity and diversity of subjectivities and experiences of boys, and of those men that are expected to be role models.” I would suggest that some of the complexities and diversity of subjectivities referred to include the ever-evolving definitions and practices of masculinity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as perceptions of raced and hybrid identities that exceed traditional classifications.

When the conversation is about boys who are missing masculine role models and the immediate assumption is that they are lacking father figures, what exactly do we mean? Are we referring to the perceived necessity of a heteronormative patriarchal head of household who can teach boys how to be men? If so, do such men have a clear idea of what masculinity might mean in the context of what we now know about toxic masculinity and its social costs and implications for health and wellness? The implication that women can’t raise boys adequately because they are



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not men has disturbing misogynistic resonances with such dangerous tropes as mama's boy or girly boy.

The idea that boys are a homogenous category that only men can transmit knowledge about, belies the actuality that the great majority of men have a limited scope of understanding of how complex and fraught 21<sup>st</sup> century masculinity can be. Gender is a continuum not a binary and we must be very careful about slippage into binary formulations when we worry about boys without male role models. It may not be the absence of men so much as the absence of a society that actually cares for all children in real and material ways. When we frame the questions as one of gender, I would say that we are missing the point.

As Tarrant and her colleagues note,

Often, concerns about poor outcomes among boys are implicitly about working-class boys and young men and there is a question here about whether the issues identified are as much about class, and other structural inequalities, as they are about gender. When the 'problem' is constructed as facing all boys it can create a class- and ethnicity-blind category that is not critiqued in the media and in some academic writing.

In other words, to frame social inequities within the parameters of masculinity can obscure the broader context of the effects of global capitalism on the lives of marginalized boys and young men. To argue that what is missing is a father, denies the toxicity of social relations in the hetero-patriarchal models of domination that structure hierarchies of class and race in such a way as to produce ongoing patterns of structural inequity. Such a view reduces the problem to an oddly Freudian dilemma. You just need a daddy and all will be well. We just need to reinstate the 19<sup>th</sup>



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century model of the family and boys will realize what it means to be a man and become successful and productive citizens. Of course, in doing this we once again teach boys that men are more important than women and that even a mother figure can never measure up to a father. This is a dangerous and misogynistic message that perpetuates male deafness to what women have to offer. It is a potent form of gendered denial at both the level of social analysis and gender relations.

As Tarrant argues,

structural explanations for the difficulties some young men experience are strategically avoided through this discourse, and the male role model discourse thus becomes an individualising and often blaming strategy that seems to serve interests quite removed from those of young men. Such an approach therefore ignores the agency of the individuals comprising the group considered to be experiencing problems. Evidence indicates that the experiences, perspectives and social contexts of young men are shaped by various forms of inequality that need to be taken more fully into account, particularly in the development of public policy.

For those of us in CYC it is not just in the development of public policy, but in the very core of a developmental relational approach to care. To tacitly accept the adult male role model approach can insidiously imbed subtle and not so subtle misogynistic, classist, racist, and ageist assumptions into the work we do and how we see the young people we work with. It can deeply influence our sense of who they are and what they need. It can produce a kind of deafness that makes it difficult if not impossible to hear what boys are telling us. It can even blind the boys



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themselves to their own subjective experience. And when the role model fails to produce the life promised, there can be resentment and even rage that will somehow be seen as characterological rather than symptomatic of a society that has no real intention of caring.

From my perspective, it is our role to build alternative relations of care that function within the material reality of young people's lives today. This requires a collaborative struggle to build equitable relations that refuse binary constructs that would reduce our capacity to work together across ages and genders to build a better world for all of us. It is a monumental task that we perform in a million small ways every day we work with young people and in the process mutually transform ourselves and the world around us.

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# CYC-Online

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# Postcard from Leon Fulcher

**From Hobbiton, near Matamata, New Zealand**

**K**ia Ora Tatau Katoa and greetings to one and all! Where has 2024 gone? It's August already! In the Northern Hemisphere, school holidays are coming to an end while in Southern Hemisphere places like New Zealand, ski season is well underway with ample supplies of snow.

An aerial search in 1998 led Sir Peter Jackson's team of location scouts to the Alexander farm, a stunning 1,250-acre sheep farm in the heart of the Waikato. They quickly realised that



**Hobbiton Movie Set,  
Matamata, New Zealand**

**Hobbiton is located few minutes outside the  
Waikato town of Matamata**



**Established first for the Lord of the Rings trilogy;  
extended for the Hobbit series**



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the Hobbits had found a home near Matamata – a must stop when visiting New Zealand.

In one particular part of the farm, a magnificent pine tree towered over a nearby lake, adjacent to a rising hill. Bag End now sits atop that hill, overlooking the Party Tree, as that pine would later be known. The surrounding areas

were untouched, no power lines, no buildings and no roads in sight. This meant that Sir Peter Jackson could leave the 20th century behind, and fully submerge himself in the fantasy world of Middle earth.

In March 1999 the crew began the nine-month quest to bring the ideas for Hobbiton to fruition; help was provided by the New Zealand Army, and soon 39 temporary Hobbit Holes were scattered across the 12-acre plot used for the set. Secrecy was key, and strict security measures were put in place by the production company throughout construction and filming. Filming commenced in December 1999, and it took around three months to get a wrap on The Shire.

After an initial attempt at demolition, 17 bare plywood facades remained. These shells would serve as the



**Only some of the 40 Hobbit Houses are accessible, while others are not**



**Attention to detail is a distinctive feature throughout the Hobbiton Village**

catalyst that propelled Hobbiton forward into the public eye, with guided tours commencing in 2002. In 2009, Sir Peter Jackson returned to film The Hobbit trilogy, and he left behind the beautiful movie set you'll see today; 44 permanently reconstructed Hobbit Holes, in the same fantastic detail seen in the movies. In 2012, The Green Dragon Inn opened as the finale to the journey where guests now finish their Hobbiton experience with a refreshing beverage.

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973) was a British philologist who specialized in Old and Middle English. He was educated at Oxford University, where he would later return to teach English literature several years after serving as an officer in World War I. There, while

grading student exams one day, he found that someone had left a page in their exam book blank, and on it Tolkien wrote: "*In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.*" And the Hobbit was born.



**Other Hobbit Houses have elaborate interiors where visitors marvel at the detail**



**Even the Hobbit toilets have been created and decorated with care and attention**

The Hobbit is set in Middle-earth and follows home-loving Bilbo Baggins, the Hobbit of the title, who joins the wizard Gandalf and the thirteen dwarves of Thorin's Company, on a quest to reclaim the dwarves' home and treasure from the dragon Smaug.

The family operating the New Zealand farm where Hobbiton is located didn't know who Sir Peter Jackson was, nor had they ever heard of Tolkien's books. However, they agreed, little thought that their farm would become a world-wide destination for Lord of the Rings fans!

One of the surprising features of the tour involved learning that a large tree overlooking the village was an artificial creation. In order to film during the winter period, close to a million leaves had to be had painted at Sir Peter Jackson's insistence that filming would be consistent with the season. Imagine the university student work experience hand painting a million leaves still attached to the tree! I wonder how many child and youth care workers have watched The Hobbit?



**Looking back across the lake at The Green Dragon Inn where the tours end**



**The water mill provides both accommodation and power generated for the village**



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