

CYC-Online

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



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

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Here for the Right Reasons

Kari Sisson

Any fans of reality dating shows are familiar with its contestants stating they are 'here for the right reasons', insisting on their authenticity in the seemingly least authentic scenario. The phrase is interesting, however, when we are pondering the current evolving (and yet waning) workforce. It seems the pandemic has heightened our mindfulness about how we spend our time, and mission driven careers have become especially attractive. People want to show up at the workplace for the right reasons.

So how can we ride this wave of consciousness and facilitate a match between mission driven organizations and mission driven individuals? Fortunately, we are in the business of children. Everyone has the commonality that we have all been a child, it's a universal experience. Digging deeper, the more individualized experiences in our childhoods can lead us to focus on special areas of need. It's not uncommon for survivors of sexual exploitation to work with CSEC youth and those with histories of drug and alcohol use to work in recovery programs. It's also well known that a significant number of staff working in therapeutic residential treatment programs have experienced elevated levels of adversity in their



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own childhoods which has the potential to accelerate the relational bond with the young people being served. This is a potential win.

In TRC, the complexities of the youth are often the lead story. Program leaders evaluate and mitigate risk 24/7. Stress levels are high and resources are low. Carving out time to highlight and celebrate the strengths and successes of quality work being done can be a challenge, but this process is vital to the overall health of the organization and to the health of our workforce. Investing in an organization where the challenges lead the conversation can be daunting for a potential employee and we lose that opportunity to draw quality staff into our team if we don't balance the messaging with the actual and strived-for goals of permanency and well-being. The messaging matters.

Let's say we promote our mission statement to get fantastic staff in the door and we invest in their hire, their training, their health insurance...we invest in their future careers. The danger is letting the mechanics of a hiring process snuff out that initial excitement which may distance our new star team member from their personal and professional inspiration that brought them to you in the first place. The opportunity, however, is in encouraging and supporting these shining stars to where they can truly use their powers of engagement to support healing and transformation.

There are no magic bullets when it comes to solving the workforce crisis, which is unfortunate when the ripple effects of being understaffed frequently lead to program closures and service interruptions. Staffing shortages are not a regional issue or a country-wide problem, but rather a global crisis that begs for a collective thought process on solutions. Our emerging global workforce, when we can indeed find and engage them,



has been consistently vocal about what makes them show up both physically and mentally in the tough and often low-paying field of child and youth care, and it's when they are here day in and day out *for the right reasons*.

KARI SISSON is Executive Director of the The Association of Children's Residential & Community Services (ACRC) and a member of the Board of Governors of CYC-Net.



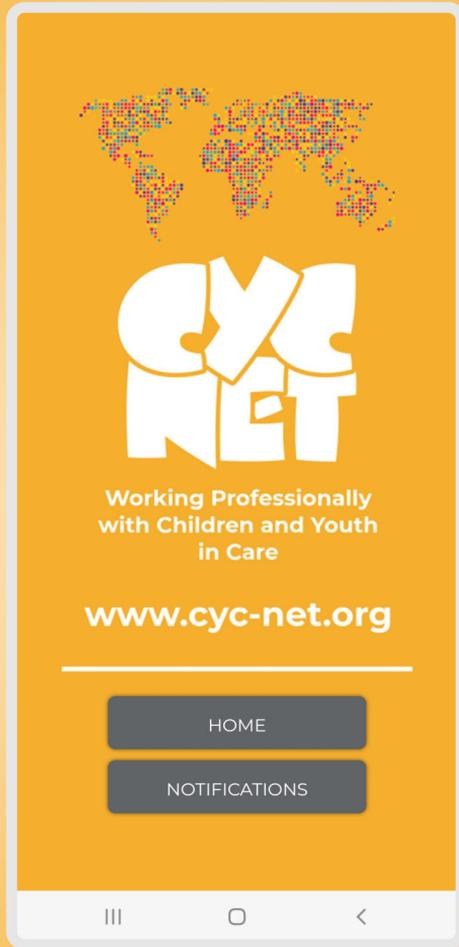
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A Writing Journey, and Call to Action

Patricia Kostouros

I have often talked about my educational journey but rarely openly talked about my writing journey. I want to share my journey, then offer an opportunity to join together. To help overcome the hesitation to write about the child and youth care profession, your ideas about practice and reflections on your work or the work of others.

I moved around a lot when I was a child, 19 times before I was 18 years old. You can imagine the disruption in my education. I use the word education in a broad sense. It disrupted my social opportunities, so I was often awkward as a kid. It disrupted my understanding of community because I was never in one for very long. It disrupted my knowledge and use of the English language but I could swear!

I recall one of the many moves when I was in grade three, and the teacher shouted at me because I did not know what a paragraph was. I recall a year or so later when the teacher was talking about verbs and adjectives, and I was thinking, “what the hell is an adjective,” but I did not ask because all the other kids seemed to know. And, remember starting a new school in a new city in grade eight in May, and the teacher told me I had to do the class presentation like all the other students. I prepared my presentation (no Powerpoint back then), stood in front of the class of new



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peers, and I was so nervous that I promptly threw up in front of everyone (no making friends now). After that, I was unable to speak in public until I dealt with it in therapy.

Somehow, I managed to get to grade eleven but I was not doing well, so I dropped out. After I quit, I remember my vocational math teacher came to me in the retail store I worked at and tried to talk me into coming back to school. I did not heed his words, but they did inspire me until I did eventually go back. When I applied to college as a mature student I completed a knowledge test and was told I could apply without upgrading. So, I applied to the Child and Youth Care program at MacEwan University (College at the time) in Edmonton and did very well. After working for a few years someone encouraged me to complete a bachelor's degree. I went to the University of Victoria, also in Child and Youth Care, I also did very well there. Several of my instructors encouraged me to pursue a master's degree, so I applied and was successful – until my first paper.

It was here that I was told, many times, that I could not write. Those were the exact words that were used many times “*you can't write.*” These comments brought back my secondary school experiences, with teachers telling me I was incompetent. But they were right. I was a terrible writer. My thesis supervisor asked me to withdraw and go into the project-based master's instead of a thesis. After lots of tears and several counselling appointments, I did not withdraw, I went back to my supervisor, and he agreed. I would get my papers edited before submitting. I always had to be several days ahead of the deadlines because of the extra time I needed.

After completing the coursework, it was time to write my thesis. I loved the topic and was enthusiastic about what I was learning but trying to



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bring myself to write was very difficult. My new partner offered to help. In any event, I thought I had learned enough from the edits I had to make on the course papers, so I took him up on his offer. My eyes welled up with tears when he sat me down after the first look at my draft, and every single page was marked with mistakes, either in grammar, APA or both. I was so embarrassed. How could I have reached this point when I could not write? Still, I managed to get over myself, finished the work, and vowed I was done with education (never say never, I now have a PhD).

Throughout my career, people would tell me that I had important contributions to make to the field of child and youth care and that I should write about them. I would nod politely, but was thinking, 'no f***ing way.' Famous last words. There was a topic I really wanted to write about – so I did and submitted it to the Child and Youth Care journal. I was contacted by the editor at the time, saying that my topic was of interest, but it needed to be edited, and would I be willing to work with the copy editor. I was not surprised that it needed to be edited; I was used to it by now. I was however, surprised by the number of edits it needed; I thought I had gotten better at this! Those nasty words from my secondary school teachers, which by now had become my own, crept back in; back to therapy. I got over myself, did the edits (back and forth a few times), and it was published. Then I completed some writing courses.

Part of what I learned in those courses that no matter what I write, I will always need someone to edit my work. I am simply too close to it to see what I cannot see. What I have in my thoughts does not always translate well onto paper. I had to learn that I should not write the way I speak, these are different ways to articulate. I also realized that the As I received in my



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undergraduate work was partly due to kind-hearted teachers that cared more about the content of what I was saying than how I said it.

I can talk about this writing journey now because I have gotten over myself. I now have completed two books and several published articles and book chapters. I had to work hard to get there. I had to accept the need to edit my work, more than once. I know that it is not personal. Imagine how I felt when at a recent conference, someone I did not know leaned over to me and said, “*besides being an author, what do you do?*” My heart skipped a beat, me an author. Believe me I claimed that title, author; I worked for it.

There are things in this field that need to be examined, reflected upon, and questioned, and it helps to be in a community so that we do not keep these thoughts to ourselves and our small circles. So, I am urging you to write. Write about your questions about our field, why we practice in certain ways, where these practices come from, and what you think about these practices. Write about your reflections on your work, the work of others, the history of our field, and the child and youth care stories that stand out to you.

A Call to Action

At the recent National Child and Youth Care Conference in Canmore, Alberta, Canada, a group of us discussed the need for more voices in our field and more people writing about our profession. We spoke about the idea of writing groups and writing mentors. Now there is a group of us willing to act as writing mentors – if you are willing to take up this call to write. You are not the only one with writing fears; together we can work



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through our collective hesitation about writing. We can work in pairs or small groups virtually, by phone or by email. Do not let yourself make excuses. Instead, make the time to further your thoughts to educate others, to contribute to our field, so that one day, someone will call you an author.

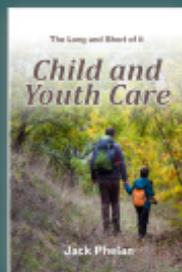
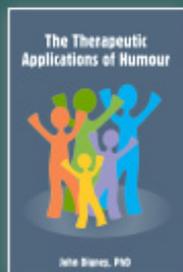
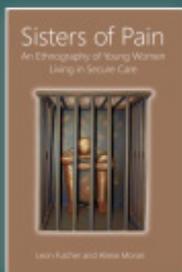
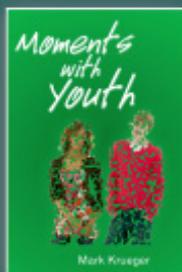
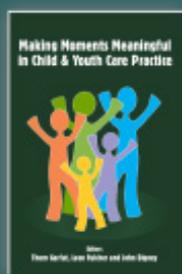
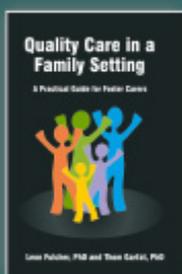
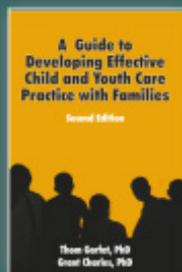
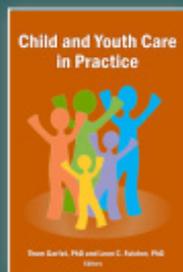
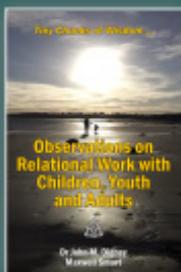
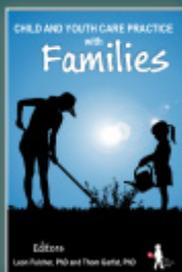
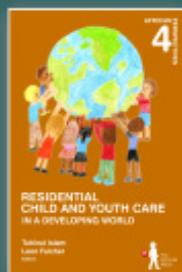
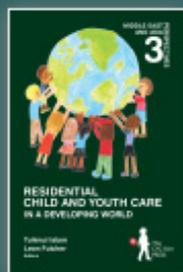
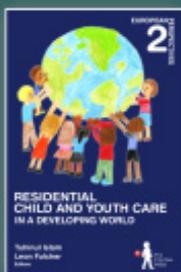
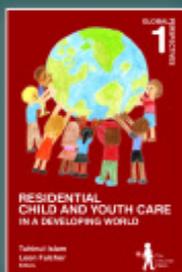
DR. PATRICIA KOSTOUROS is Full Professor in Child Studies and Social Work at Mount Royal University and is presently acting as the Chair of the department. Patricia's research includes Intimate Partner Violence, student wellness, compassion fatigue, and trauma-sensitive teaching. Before academia Patricia has worked in most child and youth care sectors, managed a youth shelter, a women's shelter, and was the Executive Director of a residence for women with a trauma history. Patricia has several articles, books and book chapters. She was the co-chair of the post-secondary student mental health initiative across Canada.



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Colorful Stories

Ziigwanbinesii Charles

Some pages of our stories are worn and wrinkled

Some have unfinished sentences of promises never kept

How will you use your medicine to thread the pages back together?

How will you help heal?

One of the things I love about being a Child and Youth Care Practitioner are the books we get to read. The stories we hear from diverse and honest authors. The young people we walk along side.

In daily interactions with young people, we are stepping into their story, like a chapter in their book. It's important for us to take note of the past (context), be present in the current setting and the direction the plot is heading (future). We need to be mindful of their influence in a young person's life. We must take note of their previous experiences, key players, or lack of, be in the moment, adapt to the changing pages that the young person is writing. We start in the now and make use of every minute. We need to be present, thoughtful, curious, and kind.



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One of the things I have found walking alongside young people is that many are exhausted by telling their story. Over time there are layers of shame, like caulking that fills the deep cracks where love, belonging, vulnerability, and identity sit anxiously waiting to be noticed and filled.

Many young people have been spun like a top wandering through their own lives often at the hands of the adults who were to 'keep them safe.' Through these traumatic, neglectful, and isolating experiences they have built a protective barrier. Think of the 1990s *Home Alone* movie and the scenes where Kevin must protect himself. He goes through extreme effort to keep himself safe from a break in by two scary adults. All he uses is what he knows. What makes sense from his world view and experience. All he has are his wise eleven years. Just like Kevin, young people set up tests and traps for the adults in their lives to keep themselves safe. They are smart and want to measure our effort, some will always have an escape route, some will always have one foot out the door and some will always be pushing us away – I call this the 'push pull.'

When complex trauma is present, we often see extreme highs and lows in terms of the young person's connection, their responsiveness and interest. We know through our work that young people will 'dip in and out' of our co-created space based on their past experiences with adults due to the lack of safety. Hanging in, through the highs and lows are a part of the re-writing we (CYC's) do with young people who want connection but are not sure how to express their needs. This re-writing is an essential component in laying the foundation for healing. Young people need to experience healthy, genuine, safe, and constant relationships to re-write their book. Healing brings new chapters.



I had a young person say to me, “I bet if I told you what I did at home you wouldn’t want to spend any more time with me. You would think I’m a freak- just like mom.” This is a clear invitation for connection and an example of vulnerability, storytelling, and the internal shame being carried. You might also know that a young person wouldn’t say this unless they wanted to. They felt in control and were testing if I would really hang in. Assessing how I listen, react, and sit with them through their story. Being calm and gentle as the receiver of these stories lays the groundwork in continuing to be a supportive character throughout their book.

Over time through these small moments, familiarity, trust, and safety start to become normalized. But be aware - there is always a perfectly timed ‘stink bomb’ that was previously planted just waiting to be stepped on if the adult does not tread carefully. Or maybe you will come down a road one day when you had the green light hours before to a sign saying “keep out f**ers” with skulls all over it. Only the playful, thoughtful, and curious survive these types of interactions.

Child and youth practitioners must be mindful of what character they will be in the young person’s book. How will your support of the main character influence the following chapters to come? Will you be the person who finally unlocks the door? Will you continue to come back after being slashed by razor sharp words? Will you look beyond to see the young person’s coping and defensive behaviors as strengths and transferable skills? Will you finally be the one who is present throughout the turbulence? Will you make the effort the young person is so deserving off?

To be from a place of kindness, listen to understand, and to be a role model, is challenging and often tests us to great lengths especially when



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met with verbal or physical hostility (or both). Softness and gentleness are skills – practice them. It is important to note here it is not about us. We need to be mindful that the young person is at the center of our focus, of our hearts and minds. Remember, the young person is deserving of care. The young person is deserving of your dedication. The young person is deserving of your consistency. The young person IS deserving because they are human.

Healing

What a beautiful but ironically painful process healing can be. When we come into a young person's life, we often are provided jumbled information from their book. Some pages are blacked out, missing, burned, ripped and some are worn and wrinkled. Sometimes there are unfinished sentences written of promises never kept.

This is where the uniqueness of a Child and Youth Care Practitioner comes in. In the minute-to-minute interactions we can help thread the pages of the young person's book back together. To help the young person make sense of their story and to dig deep to find out who they are DESPITE their challenges, or the labels put on them.

When we have the attitude that the young person is DESERVING, that care and love do not have to be earned. When we recognize there is a meaning for every behavior. This is when the magic starts. No amount of gold stars will fill the deep cracks of love that never was but should have been.



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Attitude and Belief

We should always be reflecting on the young person's attitude and belief about their worth. We can be curious and ask: How can I invest in this young person's daily experience? How can I enrich the pages to come? What is the need? Am I looking at this young person holistically and am I keeping in mind their lived experience?

Wise Words

A friend shared with me some wise words about responsibility that have always stuck with me since the day I heard it. They talked about how humans need to bring back responsibility for one another. Imagine how we would interact with one another if we felt responsible, that every young person we encountered was our kin, our relative and belonged to us. How would this change our *thinking, being* and most importantly *doing*? As a society we are less community focused, and this has led to loneliness, shame, and a lack of belonging. The idea behind being responsible for someone is to acknowledge their unique purpose in this world. That we are here to guide young people to their purpose, understand that everyone has influence, help them harness their power and thrive. If the idea behind responsibility in this context is that nobody is allowed to walk this road alone, how might that change the young person's experience? How might this change the way we connect with one another?

Reflections

How would our young people write their book if they had a key character that felt responsible for their well-being? Someone who pointed



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out their uniqueness, strengths and the areas that need some extra attention. How would they begin to think and feel about themselves? That despite the messy healing process they had someone who saw them and accepted them whole heartedly? Someone who knew each day would be different and stuck around. Someone who knew how to hold on when the 'shame monster' poked its head out and the therapeutic relationship had to start from the beginning? How would this influence their internal narrative and the story they shared with the world?

What do you feel when someone says "I'm responsible for you. I care for you. You are important to me, and this is how I will show you. This is what you mean to me, let us do this together or you matter to me." Young people are no different from you.

It is up to us to support *revitalization* of the self. To help young people lift the shackles of shame and uncover how useful they are. Help young people share their book (wisdom) with the world.

Every story starts somewhere.

ZIIGWANBINESII CHARLES is from the Mnjikaning Chippewas of Rama First Nation and lives in Ontario (Canada) currently residing on the William's Treaty Territory. Ziigwanbinesii holds an advanced diploma in Child and Youth Care and served on the faculty of the Indigenous Studies Program and the Child and Youth Care Program at Fleming College. In addition to various direct care roles with families and youth, Ziigwanbinesii is an active community educator and consultant.



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The main journal cover features a large, close-up photograph of a child's face with blue eyes and freckles. The top half is an orange banner with the journal title 'Relational Child & Youth Care Practice' in white. The text 'Volume 34 Issue 3 / 2021' is centered below the title. A large white logo is on the left. The bottom section is black, containing the journal's logo on the left, the ISSN number 'ISSN 2410-2954' in the center, and the publisher's logo 'The CYC-Net PRESS' and website 'press.cyc-net.org' on the right.

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Deliberate Practice in CYC

Doug Magnuson

In my last column, in the October 2022 edition of this publication, I discussed what research says about how to improve one's practice and the importance of feedback. The research in counseling suggests that one's deliberate use of feedback in practice is more important to one's effectiveness than one's qualifications. Further, differences in the abilities of practitioners are more important for effectiveness than diversities among youth or in setting. I promised to take up the question of how this is done in CYC.

The most important condition for improvement is "deliberate practice," as it is sometimes called. Getting feedback is the first step; using that feedback to change one's approach and behavior is equally important. This seems obvious; despite this, few practitioners do it, and few organizations encourage it as part of the culture.

The basic steps of deliberate practice are:

1. Isolate the skill. Break it into small pieces and practice each piece separately.
2. Develop the skill by repetitively doing it over and over and try variations.
3. Assess your competency. Get feedback from youth and colleagues.



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4. Begin to recognize when it can be used. Eventually it will become easy.

This will seem artificial and inauthentic, in the beginning. Remember that authentic incompetence is not that useful! Effective practice is not “natural.”

Here are some related but more general ideas for implementing deliberate practice, with feedback, in CYC settings. These may need to be adapted to your setting and to your clients.

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1. You have to start with feedback from youth, and you do not want to use non-specific, open-ended questions to ask for it, like “Any comments?” “Any feedback for me?” You want to ask concrete questions about relationships, behaviors, incentives, rewards, consequences, values, goals, activities, perceptions, and so forth. Not the youth’s behaviors and values. Yours, or at least your role in the relationship.
2. You want to measure whether you are helping youth, and you want to measure your skill performance. You want the result to be something you can track over time, so a simple quantitative scale works best. It should be easy and fast to complete, and it should measure what you want to know. The Session Rating Scale and Outcome Rating Scale, from Scott Miller, are two well-known short measures, and you can find them on the internet. There are hundreds of them, and you can also develop your own. This does not mean qualitative feedback is bad or wrong—only that you want consistent, regular, easy measurement, and the quantitative data can be followed up with qualitative questions.
3. Measure the skill regularly so that you receive feedback and so that trends become obvious, early. These can be discussed with youth; for example, you can point out a trend and ask what is going right—or wrong. It directs both of you to the relationship and to scores rather than personalizing feedback from youth to you and from you to youth. It demonstrates seriousness to youth.



4. Be alert to changes. Research demonstrates that we are often not aware when something is not going well, and we are often self-deceptive about this. Collect data and information consistently.
5. You want to use some type of road map or guide to help you keep track of the skills important to you. Use your agency's guide, a list of CYC competencies, or your own list of things you want to practice or learn to do. Use a list that is useful to you. Document your progress.
6. Ask a colleague or mentor you admire to watch you perform a skill, and solicit feedback. Ask that same person to watch you practice that skill before you need it.
7. Recruit youth to help you practice. You can do this before the circumstance requires it, and it can be done light-heartedly and as a way to cue youth to your intentions. If you're very lucky, youth will volunteer to practice their response.
8. Try out your new skill at work. Ask youth and colleagues for specific feedback about how well you did.
9. Collect some data about the impact of your skill. Does it help? What are the unintended effects?
10. There is often a lot of down time in CYC practice; use that time for practice and thinking about how to obtain feedback.
11. Break up your work shifts into small units of time, and think about how that time could be improved. Are you fixing dinner? Transporting someone to practice? What skill can you use to improve the richness or impact of that small activity? What do good colleagues do?



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12. What personal skills do you have that could be brought to the workplace? Music, culture, athletics, recreation, games, cooking, and academic talents make you interesting to young people. Do them at work.
13. Keep records of your goals and the work you have done to achieve them.
14. Ask youth about their goals and help them figure what steps are needed to achieve them. Help them track their progress and do everything you can to assist with their progress. Link your skill practice to their goals.

Your ability to implement intervention activities and treatment goals in a program may not be that important to your effectiveness. Treatment models and interventions come and go! Instead, it is possible that your deliberate practice of skills important to dynamic relationships with youth and to creating an interesting world for them will be invaluable, and it will be interesting to you as well.

DOUG MAGNUSON is Professor, School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. More about his work can be found at <https://dougagnuson.netlify.com/> and he can be reached at doug@uvic.ca



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TRAINING
GROUNDS

Authentic connection
is not a luxury

it's the **solution** to
many of our troubles.

JAMES FREEMAN, EDITOR



CARING TO CONNECT

NURTURING HOPEFUL,
HEALING RELATIONSHIPS
WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

JAMES FREEMAN
EDITOR

“I love it! I wish I had this year's ago.
I feel I can be even more help to the
young people in my life.” - Tonia



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Resilience and Survival: Black Teenage Mothers 'Looked After' by the State Tell their Stories About their Experience of Care

Nadia Mantovani and Hilary Thomas

'Looked after' young people are among the most disadvantaged members of our society. While their disadvantaged status should not be ignored, poor outcomes are often emphasised at the expense of good ones. This article reports a study that adopts the concept of resilience to understand the narratives of the participants' experience of care and foster care. A total of 15 young mothers, aged 16-19 and mainly from black African backgrounds, were interviewed. Despite lacking a 'secure base', informants invested in a sense of moral identity and a source of self-directedness, which enabled them to move from victim of circumstances to individuals who overcome their circumstances.

Keywords

asylum seeking, black teenage mothers, 'looked after', resilience, unaccompanied minors.



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Introduction

Social services policy and practice systems across different countries are being reconfigured to achieve positive holistic outcomes for young people (McMurray and others, 2011). There are many opportunities where child welfare professionals can actively help young people in adversity to provide a secure base to develop resilience. 'Looked after' young people endure a high level of adversity and deprivation. They experience high rates of emotional and behavioural disturbance (see Roy and others, 2000), suffer from mental health problems (Akister and others, 2010), are vulnerable to engaging in drug use and sex work (Cusick and others, 2003) and have worse health than that of the general population (Audit Commission, 1994). They have greater health needs than those of their peers but are less likely to receive adequate health care (Department of Health, 1998).

In addition, 'looked after' young people experience poor life outcomes in terms of low levels of educational attainments and limited access to education (Department for Education, 2010; Jackson, 2001), high levels of unemployment, poverty and homelessness (Biehal and others, 1995; Cheung and Heath, 1994; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998) and are overrepresented in the criminal justice system (Youth Justice Board, 2005).

The family circumstances leading to being taken into care — material and emotional disadvantage — are contributory factors to the problems 'looked after' young people face (Chase and others, 2006; Knight and others, 2006). These experiences and sources of deprivation form clusters of 'risk factors' associated with vulnerability to early pregnancy and parenthood among young people in and leaving care (Chase and others, 2006).



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Representations of teenage motherhood as a social ill in need of a measured policy response is widespread in social policy discussions, which focus efforts on reducing teenage motherhood (e.g. Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), 1999). Teenage motherhood is often described in relation to poor social functioning and poor outcomes, which characterise the disadvantaged (Graham and McDermott, 2005). It is typically framed as a social problem through links with poor psychological functioning (Hudson and others, 2000), parenting incompetence (Davis and others, 2001), child neglect and abuse (Maynard, 1997), low socioeconomic status and unemployment, and low levels of educational attainment (Chevalier and Viitanen, 2003). The current study focused on the experiences of young black mothers as the racial-ethnic perspective has remained largely silent in early parenthood research (Bonell, 2004).

Supporting 'looked after' young mothers

In Britain, 'looked after' young people are more likely to have children in their teenage years than young people who have not been in care (Barn and others, 2005; Biehal and others, 1995; Corlyon and McGuire, 1999). However, little is known of the social outcomes of 'looked after' teenage mothers because research with this population tends to focus on sexual antecedents of teen pregnancy. Key to the provision of support that young mothers require is a trusting relationship between young parents and carers, professionals and/or family (Knight and others, 2006). Research exploring the types of support available to 'looked after' young mothers report mixed experiences. Chase and others (2006) found that young mothers had highly disrupted patterns of care with multiple placements,



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while others valued their involvement with specialist mother and baby foster care placements. Similarly, Knight and others (2006) reported that having a trusted confidante was significant for young parents to receive continuity of care, while instability imposed by changes in staffing or frequent moves, was a major barrier to providing any consistent support for them.

Specialist mother and baby foster placements provide effective support to younger parents in care. However, foster carers are still unclear of their role in relation to the young person and the baby once this is born (Knight and others, 2006). These authors found that foster carers were unclear whether their role was to assess the mother's parenting skills, whether they had to look after the baby and whether the baby born while the mother was in care was also 'looked after'. These problems are compounded by the dearth of family foster care in Britain resulting from the decline in residential care for children and young people. The shortfall of placements has meant that, in many cases, placements are not available and, when a placement can be found, it is not necessarily the placement of choice (Sellick, 2006).

Resilience

This study examines the experiences of participants through the lens of resilience. While this originated in developmental psychology (e.g. Garmezy, 1973), associated constructs such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and hardiness (Kobasa, 1979) were developed within social and cognitive psychology. Resilience came to stand for an individual resource, for 'something' that enables someone not only to resist, but to overcome



adversity: a pattern of behaviour and functioning indicative of positive adaptation in the context of risk or adversity (Masten and Coatsworth, 1998).

In this study, we adopted a concept of resilience embedded in sociology, conceptualised in terms of human agency and resistance and survival (Shaikh and Kauppi, 2010). It is the existential capacity of individuals, facing multiple forms of psychological/physiological trauma, to demonstrate resilience in their ability to construct meaning in their lives and exercise their 'free will' by making deliberate choices.

Research methods

This study was set within the interpretative tradition where the participants' interpretation and knowledge about their social world are examined (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). The research addressed two questions: what are the experiences of teenage mothers of State care and how do young mothers experience State parenting?

Informants were recruited in three London Local Authorities (LAs) selected for their geographical diversity, reported rates of teenage pregnancy and their high concentration of black minority groups. The experiences reported here do not aim to be characteristic of Britain as a whole, therefore, are not generalisable. Purposive sampling was used to select participants for this study. The stated eligibility criteria were: having been in care for a minimum of 1 year; currently in care or left care; aged 16–19; from black minority — Black African, Black British, Black Caribbean, Mixed-Heritage; and be a mother or currently pregnant.



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In-depth unstructured interviews were undertaken with 15 young women by Nadia Mantovani between 2005 and 2007. A non-hierarchical relationship when interviewing respondents (Oakley, 1981) was taken and the informants' participation was considered as a 'consultative process' (Thompson, 1996). Ethical approval was granted by the University of London Committee and MREC governing body for ethics (MREC N. 05/Q0801/168). Recruitment was made through key workers who knew the teenagers and their levels of literacy, to fully explain the project and implications of participation in ways the young women could understand. Key workers were ready to support informants if any distress had resulted from revelations. At the outset, participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the project at any time. They were informed that they would receive £10 as an acknowledgement of their help in the study. Contact details were not passed on to the researcher until consent to do so had been given by the informants.

Informants were interviewed in their own homes and interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. To preserve anonymity, the participants have been given names typical of each country of origin. Data were analysed using a modified grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Transcripts were read a number of times to allow the identification of themes and categories to emerge. The provisional themes were subsequently examined against findings from other transcripts for further verification or rejection. Emerging themes were reviewed, the interviews scripts were indexed in detail, enabling refinement of the analytic focus.



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The participants

A total of 25 potential participants returned the participation form, 15 of whom were interviewed. There were difficulties in establishing first and/or further contacts with the remaining 10 women. Of the 15 women who took part, nine were recruited through Social Services, one through peer-education groups, four through family support groups and one through snowballing.

At the time of interview, three young mothers were aged 19; five were aged 18; five were aged 17; and two were aged 16. Of the 15 participants, two were British nationals and 13 were from the African continent (three from South West Africa, five from West Africa and five from East Africa). Of the 13, two had migrated at a young age with their families, and 11 were unaccompanied minors when they arrived in Britain. Of these 11, two were educational migrants and nine were asylum seekers.

Informants in this study were under the LA legal responsibility for their care. The legal and moral duty to their respective care populations is encapsulated in the term corporate parent (Dobson, 1998). Corporate parenting is the collective responsibility of the Council towards looked-after children and care leavers. This encompasses the co-operation of local services such as health, education, housing and social care in looking after a child (Department for Education and Skills, 2003; Department of Health, 1989) to promote the welfare of 'looked after' children and young people and to ensure that their needs are adequately addressed.

The young mothers had been in care for an average of 2 years (range 1–4 years): 11 had experienced one placement and four had experienced multiple placements (foster care, children's home, and mother and baby



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unit). Two of the mothers entered care aged 14, five aged 15, six aged 16 and two aged 17. On discovering their pregnancies, all young women were in the care of the State, while at the time of the interview, three were living independently and supported by the 'leaving care' team. The range of State parenting arrangements included foster parent ($n = 10$), residential children's home ($n = 2$), residential temporary accommodation ($n = 2$) and one was temporarily placed with her boyfriend's family. Participants reported receiving help or advice from the following agencies in the 12 months before the interview: social workers ($n = 12$), voluntary organisation (e.g. YMCA; $n = 3$), Citizens Advice Bureau ($n = 1$). One participant did not receive any help from agencies.

Results

The following sections investigate the dependability and consistency — or otherwise — of the State as a parent. We examined the informants' accounts of their experience of care, exploring their relationships with their social workers and foster carers and their response to adverse circumstances whilst in foster care. When examining the State as a parent, the image of an 'absent parent' emerged from the data, someone who does not have time to care. The complex backgrounds of the 11 unaccompanied minors are noted.

Being an unaccompanied minor in Britain

The 11 unaccompanied minors mentioned political, economic, persecution and violence as key reasons for leaving their countries. Although informants were not asked to discuss such emotive issues, some



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chose to share their stories about being brought to safety to Britain and then abandoned. In search of settlement, they navigated through the immigration maze of solicitors, Home Office officials, Refugee Council agents, asylum-seeking support teams, and health and social care professionals. As a result of past and present stressors — a lost sense of being in charge of their lives and memories of disintegration following war — four informants received therapeutic sessions (psychiatrists or psychologists).

Inadequate supportive relationships: the absent parent

Official policy documents argue that a necessary aspect of effective corporate parenting is the building and maintenance of positive relationships by social workers with the individual children in their care (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). Overall, informants reported mixed experiences of corporate parenting: four recounted supportive care-giving practices (last section), three mixed experiences, and eight disclosed being parented at a distance and via the ‘revolving doors’ of multiple social workers with whom they had intermittent contacts with long gaps between each contact (see also Driscoll, 2011; Knight and others, 2006). They had different social workers coming in and out of their lives during their care experience, viewing the succession of strangers entering their lives as invasive. The unremitting scrutiny the young women felt under is clearly articulated by Cherie’s account:



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When I was in care I had a lot of social workers ... and it was all new to me. And I just felt that having so many social workers coming and going all these people that know about you, which is really strange. (Cherie)

Frequent changes undermined the quality of care and services informants received, and impacted the consistency of care as informants could not access support when they needed it. This impacted the stability of the relationships with their care-givers, as informants lacked the security they needed to thrive. Twain's excerpt highlights problematic case management when she transitioned from one social worker to another.

The first social worker I had she really did support me very much. Then I got another one and that one she was horrible, she was totally different from the one we I had before. Then after that I got another one, and then I got another one. She was...you could tell her your problems, but you don't seem to get anywhere, but the first I had when I just had my baby I got good support from her eventually. (Twain)

Intermittent and fragmented contacts with social workers were a common experience among the young women interviewed. Although the informants found it hard to establish contact with their corporate parent, this did not deter them from trying. This 'absent parent' figure generated a feeling of being unsupported and signalled a lack of interest in their



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welfare. This is encapsulated in Limber's description of how she felt as a result of her social worker's approach to caregiving:

I felt they were pushing me back. If, I don't call, she doesn't know how I am, she doesn't know how I feel, she doesn't know how my son is. She doesn't seem to care about us. It's like she has completely forgotten us. (Limber)

The nature of these relationships was inconsistent, unstable and unreliable. What informants longed for was a personal relationship with their social worker, someone who invested care and time in them. Indeed, informants saw financial help as important, but knowing someone cared for their well-being was imperative. Raziya said:

You may be giving money, but when you talk to me I'll be fine.
(Raziya)

Parents' belief in the child's potential, warmth/praise, support and encouraging the child to engage in his/her environment are vital factors to promote self-directedness/self-efficacy (Sandler and others, 1989). Namuly explained:

Social workers should always listen to a social child, because when you don't encourage a young person... you leave her just to get pissed-off. From my own experience I wasn't having any encouragement from my social worker... All the time she is not



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there for me, I feel like: 'I'm nothing, there is no-one there for me'. It is frustrating because sometimes you feel rejected there is no one. And without social services' help you just mess yourself up, again and again and again. (Namuly)

These accounts underscore missed opportunities where child welfare professionals could have helped these young women in adversity to develop a sense of self-efficacy and identity. Contributory factors hindering the development of social worker relationships with children in care can be related to structural, organisational and resource issues (McLeod, 2010), personal attitudes and values regarding children and childhood, and the attributes and skills required, but it can also be related to differing ideas of what listening entails.

Experiencing adversity whilst in foster care

Being in foster care is often a defining experience in the children's/ young adults' lives, and foster care has a major role in community care services for children. Of the 10 fostered young women, six experienced some form of adversity whilst in foster care and four did not. The former experienced financial exploitation, material deprivation and opportunistic attempts to claim more money out of a newly discovered pregnancy, unattended emotional needs and abusive practices.

Cherie and Shidah talked about the financial exploitation they experienced while in foster care. The former 'didn't get the money (she) was entitled to, like a personal allowance or coat allowance', while the



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latter's 'carer used to give (her) less money (she) was entitled to'. These practices 'could destroy a relationship' Shidah commented.

Raziya spoke at length of the material deprivation she suffered which made her feel isolated and helpless:

She wasn't good to me ... she didn't do anything, really. I couldn't cope. She didn't give me money for bus fares, she didn't give me my pocket money. But the social services do pay her! For my bus fares I had to go to 'X' House to get the money, the amount of travel I did! She did disconnect everything ... the gas and she gave me an electric heater. Then she disconnected the phone ... disconnected everything! There was nothing in the house! And I was alone. (Raziya)

Pemba spoke of the foster family's attempt to claim more money from the social services once her pregnancy was discovered, and their denial to meet her needs as a result:

I was doing everything; I'm cooking for myself, washing for myself.

And they say: 'Oh, we can't give this, we can't give this'. Because my pregnancy became something so big! They wanted more money they're saying I have a baby, but this baby is not born ... nobody is looking after him. (Pemba)



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Twain and Isoke spoke of their sense of isolation and loneliness while in foster care. Isoke, for instance, felt excluded as a result of inadequate and inappropriate interpersonal and environmental interaction with the foster family, which displayed contempt because she was a 'looked after' black African expectant mother:

Emotionally she was terrible. Sometimes I will be in my room and she hasn't seen me for 2 days, and she won't even come to my room and ask if I've eaten. And she knows I'm pregnant... And her children they don't say 'hi' to people, they look down on you.

(Isoke)

Another mother spoke of the overt racial abuse when her foster mothers accused her of living off State hand-outs:

Sometimes she would make these ridiculous comments: 'Oh god this government is funny giving you people money, you should be working'. Making comments like that! 'Using the taxpayers money and you...' She made me feel horrible, like making you feel guilty. You're not working, you're eating people's money free money. She really made me feel bad. (Shidah)

The above extracts highlight the multiple disadvantages that the women in this study faced. The discrimination, hardships and poor living conditions they described underline the racial inequalities they experienced as uprooted individuals. The fact that many of them were



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seeking asylum made them particularly vulnerable to experiencing life as fragile, insecure and exposed to stereotypical remarks.

Responding to and overcoming adversity

Thus far, the data have illustrated the few opportunities that informants had to develop supportive relationships with their caregivers under State care. Nevertheless, some experienced relationships with supportive social workers and foster carers, encouraging their capacity to exercise agency, which in turn had a vital role in the promotion of resilient trajectories (Gilligan, 2000).

Supportive care-giving practices fostering resilience

Four informants identified key social workers who had provided support and encouragement in their education or more widely. In some cases, this relationship was perceived to reach beyond the boundaries of professional duty.

Those who spoke positively of their corporate parents felt that they had provided practical assistance when needed. Social workers were seen as helpful when they sorted things out and made a difference, being enablers, advocates and negotiators:

She cooked for me, we would go out for the baby shopping. She helped me with my college, 'cos I couldn't go to college for some weeks ... because of the pregnancy. She helped me to phone the college to let them know about it. We went there together before I was about to start back in college ... to get my course ... We went



together to see, ...we spoke to the course management and they said I should come back. She took the form for the child care, so I will have the child care for the baby, you know, there will be child care for the baby in that college. (Raziya)

Informants responded better to corporate parents who came across to them as friends. Three informants referred to their social worker as 'my friend whom I contact even up to now' for advice or to talk, or as someone to go out 'shopping for food and clothes, and go to the restaurant together'. Having a trusted confidant in their social worker was important as this combined elements of sociability, emotional support and a secure base. The idea that details of what corporate parents do with young people count, emerged from the data: the daily routines, the talents they nurture, the interests they stimulate, make a difference. Having 'somebody there who cares' made Nakato 'feel good'. These little things may foster in a young person the vital sense of belonging, of mattering, of counting. Developing positive and stable relationships with their social workers is vital to promote good outcomes for young people in the care system (McLeod, 2010; McMurray and others, 2011).

Practices nurturing positive change

The narratives linked with life in a foster family showed that the foster mother's attentive practices promoted the respondents' positive identity. The type of relationship with the foster mother determined the bond between them and whether the informants felt that they could seek support and advice even after moving on to independent living.



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I was like part of the family, up until now she's like to a mum to me. Whatever she had she gave it to me. She cares about my relationships and asks: 'Where are your friends? You can bring your friends here'. I'm happy because she introduced me to a very good life. Like, sometimes in the morning she comes to my room and asks: 'You're not coming down to have breakfast, what's wrong with you? Are you having something bad about your home?' She always wants to know. And then, she really teach me how to take care of the house, do some cooking, using washing machine ... she showed me how to manage my money. (Namuly)

Being placed in a specialist mother and baby foster placement provided effective support to Namuly. Biehal and others (1995) have noted that this form of support can improve outcomes for young people in care such as maintaining their homes and developing life skills.

Investing in their moral identity

Unsupportive relationships with their care-givers presented an occasion to exert their resilient identity — they had the qualities that affected their sense of personal agency, but also they invoked their religious identity which supported them when facing difficult times; when deciding about motherhood over abortion and/or adoption.

... anyway in a way she (foster carer) made me like...you have to go out there and study and get your qualifications and get your money. In a way...in a harsh way I've learned. (Shidah)



The only friend I had was God...I was giving my life to God... to tell God to help me with the situation I was (pregnant). Because I was crying every day. (Abeo)

It was vital for most informants to be seen as independent with some control over their lives as this added to their sense of self-worth. In the face of the many uncertainties that in varying degrees many of the informants experienced, they had all exerted their agency within the context of being women returning to education. They overcame the odds demonstrated by their choice to return to education after childbirth; except for two respondents, all had obtained or were in the process of gaining GCSEs or GNVQs, and many had plans for university education. Informants adjusted successfully to the negative life events underscored by their focus on educational achievement:

I had the 'Young Learner Award' in college, I was the best student in college. (Shidah)

I was the best student in my class and got very high grades. (Limber)

Continuing with education after pregnancy was important to mothers, who were 'determined to continue with education' — believing they could 'cope with both education and the baby'. Respondents viewed education as a durable investment that would be their entry to a secure, economically



safe and independent future. Informants aspired to being recognised as moral self-reliant individuals:

I want to do something with my life...and I thought I could be capable of doing it (midwifery) and help people. I just want to go to school to get a good sound education so he could be proud of me. (Isoke)

I decided to go to school and learn because that is the way to cope. When I came here, I said: 'The best I can offer myself and my son is to go to school and learn something, so I can be good to myself. (Namuly)

These extracts show how important the question of self-worth was for these mothers, not only for themselves but for their children too. Self-worth was derived from both reaching a high level of education and having a professional occupation.

Discussion

The State has had a poor record with regard to children in the care system (Department for Education and Skills, 2006), particularly when children enter care when they are older (Bullock and others, 2006), which brings a renewed emphasis to the state's 'corporate parenting' role (Dominelli and others, 2005). These findings are corroborated by the accounts of the informants interviewed for this study.



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This paper underscores the responsiveness of the care receiver to care in conditions of vulnerability and inequality (Tronto, 1993). The data show that the nature of the relationship between care providers and care receivers is central to the capacity to provide good care and that care is an interactive process. However, past and present experiences of hardships may have impacted their relationships with their care providers.

In talking about their experience of care and foster care, informants sought to shift the positioning of disadvantaged or marginalised young mothers as 'victims', to women with an 'active voice', and in so doing, they somewhat became advocates for their own rights. Although some experienced exploitative practices at the hand of their foster carers, they soon came to perceive these practices as unjust. The data indicate that, at the time of the interview, informants had already gained a perception of their rights and entitlements, and that justice had not been done to them, which they denounced.

The image of an 'absent parent' figured prominently in informants' accounts of their care experience. Care-givers who were unreliable and inconsistent (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2000) engendered a feeling of rejection and unworthiness. Championing young people's causes through sustained support is vital as this makes them feel cared for as individuals, and they do better as a result (Gilligan, 2000). The absence of a care-giver as a source of support undermines young people's confidence in the guidance they receive and their ability to make important decisions (Driscoll, 2011). In contrast, those informants who experienced a sustained and supportive relationship felt happy and fostered a sense of self-worth and of having a valued place in the world.



Informants in this study had experienced a significant degree of risk and adversity in their lives before becoming mothers, but also after that. This study brings to light how informants fashioned resilience, despite, and out of, the experiences which threatened to undermine it. Most of them successfully negotiated the individual and structural demands in the location in which they lived. Motherhood gave informants meanings in their lives: a resource they drew upon to carry on with their education, which they saw as a vehicle to fulfil their role as economically independent parents. Unlike other young care leavers who obtain few educational qualifications (Department for Education, 2010), participants carved a meaningful role for themselves and became proficient at academic activities at school, underscored by a want to be caring parents to their children. The personal accounts revealed that having at least one person who wholeheartedly cared about them with whom they had a positive relationship was a resiliency factor enabling informants to have positive outcomes (Dearden, 2004). This capacity to remain resilient despite the challenges of their traumatic backgrounds and present circumstances may be related to the migrant status of most of the sample, either as unaccompanied minors or in the company of their parents. Julca (2011) noted the capacity for resilience among migrants, despite their obvious vulnerabilities. Kohli and Mather (2003) examined the resilience displayed by unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, noting also the challenges that their complex backgrounds may pose for social workers. Nevertheless, for some young women, it was drawing on personal beliefs in a broader value system that helped them to persist in problem solving and/or in surviving a set of life circumstances.



To conclude, understanding resilience and strength among African youth in Britain requires first acknowledging their experience in Britain and recognising the continuing legacy of oppression and discrimination that affects many of them in their daily lives. Future practice should also note the positive aspects of caring highlighted in this article, those more intensive, personalised approaches that enable the forming of supportive relationships and increasing their resilience.

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And Here We Are ...

Hans Skott-Myhre

So, here we are in the final month of 2022. It has been a rough ride for young people, their allies, and friends. The world as it emerges in the early quarter of the 21st century is rife with a kind desperate uncertainty. For those of us concerned with creating a world of global relations founded on care, it has been a tough few years. While there have certainly been some improvements in reducing poverty and increasing access to medical care for some of the worlds most impoverished young people, there has also been an increase in violence of all kinds and a brutality of economic logic that creates a seemingly endless capacity for creating young people as disposable bodies.

It seems almost like a truism to say that we live in a time of massive transition. But I think if we are to make sense of what is happening to us and the young people we encounter in our work, then the inherent instability of our historical moment must be acknowledged as the lived experience of our time. In a very real sense, young people know this in their bones. For them, the world has always been unstable and very probably dangerous. For young people born at the turn of the century and now entering their early twenties, there has never been a 20th century to which they can return. It has always been the 21st century with all that implies. The call out, “OK Boomer” encapsulates the frustration of young people with their elders who seem intent on reproducing a world that no longer exists. I



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worry about this in terms of our own field of CYC where many of us are still repeating the mantras of the 20th century as though they can save us from the future.

The stakes are high for the young people who may well live to see the late 21st century. Of course, it is impossible to read the future, but at a minimum the next 60 years looks challenging to say the least. While the political landscape is most certainly unsettled and possibly quite dangerous to anyone who finds themselves outside the dominant regimes of power, it is the material world that will very likely determine the quality of life for many of us. The planet and its climate are implacable and impersonal. The fact that we as humans believe we can bargain the future is an extremely fraught gamble. The material world does not respond to anything other than material actions. No amount of rhetoric or well-intentioned conversations will shift the direction of what is quite likely a massive transition in the life sustaining capacity of the planet. As humans, we are altering the biosphere to such a degree as to exceed our capacity to comprehend what we are doing.

Our level of denial is extraordinary. In the most recent climate talks, the wealthiest countries in the world agreed to pay to offset the economic effects of climate change. In other words, to acknowledge that things will get really bad for the poorer countries because we are not doing enough to reverse the effects. Instead of radical action that might shift the negative effects of climate change, the wealthy will offer money. To believe that this will somehow work over time, while crops fail, shorelines flood, people drown, and starve is truly remarkable shortsightedness.



This kind of example is emblematic of the ways in which times of transitions, such as ours, are seldom kind to the those who don't have access to the protections of economic and social power. It has been argued that this is a historical moment of both unparalleled power for the ruling elites of global capital and a time full of portents of the end of what has been called global capitalist empire. Historically, empires often take a long time to decline and they seldom leave the stage of history gracefully. It is often a messy transition that is seldom kind and often brutal. Such times are defined by the riptides of social and political sea changes that are unpredictable and deadly for those caught up and swept away. The social landscape is indeterminate with what appear to be advances in greater levels of equity and justice met with reactionary brutality. The push and pull of a kaleidoscope of social investments swirls around and through us in ways that can be deeply unsettling. Our ability to seek the kind of consensus necessary to effectively care for one another has become profoundly challenging.

In such times, anxiety is rampant. For many of us the levels of uncertainty are unbearable and we are pretty much willing to do anything to feel less anxious. We turn to psychiatry for the balm of psychopharmacology, we seek solace in alcohol and an ever-increasing variety of opiates and their derivatives, we even turn to micro dosing psychedelics as a way to get through the day.

It all can seem too much and the attraction of feeling it less intently or not at all can be attractive. The prevailing system of dominant logic continues to center our relationships with chemical interventions as a personal problem requiring remediation by the very system creating the



problem to begin with. That is not to say that psychiatrists and other drug dealers are the source of our pain and anxiety. But, what they do in the long run also doesn't have the intended effect of making us feel better. Of course, we do feel better at first, but over time our dependency on any of these drugs (psychedelics being a possible exception) becomes a problem in and of itself. What I mean by the dominant system of logic that is at the center of the kind of bitterness and disillusion that can lead to crippling anxiety is the addictive propensities of global capitalism itself.

I would argue that the anxiety we feel and the remedies we seek are founded in the very nature of capitalist logic. The system itself is based on the ability to rip people out of their living sets of ecological relations and embed them within a world of relations driven by an abstraction called money.

Of course, these arguments are not new to anyone who has been following my columns here for the past few years. I have been arguing in every way I can think of, that if we want to assist young people through building a network of caring relations, we cannot continue to engage the tools offered us by the most comprehensive and effect system of domination and control human beings have ever devised. Audrey Lourde famously said, "You cannot use the masters tools to dismantle the master's house." Put in the simplest terms, you cannot build a system of care responsive to the material needs of young people by using tools provided to you by the system designed to parasitically take every bit of life and creativity young people possess and turn it all to the end of making more money.



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The tools are inherently corrupted and they cannot be turned from the purpose for which they have been designed. Entrepreneurship, diagnosis, treatment planning, mentorship, level systems, emotional self-regulation, natural consequences, job readiness, mindfulness, self-care, psychopharmacology, trauma based treatment, neurologically informed care (and the list goes on) all seem reasonable when read through the lens of neo-liberal ideology. I would argue, however, that each in their own way actually interferes with our capacity to build actual living sets of relations. Neoliberalism through its allies in psychology, psychiatry, education, social work, and Child and Youth Care have taken the suffering and thwarted desires of young people (and ourselves) and turned them against us. In each of the perverse forms of care I have listed above, the pain and alienation young people feel is centered within them. Their hardships are based in something they lack. The system promises to fill that lack through providing missing chemicals in the brain, missing fathers in the community, missing job skills, missing self-care, missing self-regulation, etc. Of course, these new (and they are always new) tools promise that with the replenishing of whatever is missing, young people will become resilient, competent, working, citizens in the world economy. And yet, in spite of the fact that many, if not most of these tools have been in use for decades, young people continue to struggle and one might even say failing to thrive or in some cases even survive.

In short, the neoliberal incursion into our work with young people doesn't seem to be working for young people or ourselves. I would argue that this is not because the needs of the neoliberal agenda are not being met. Neoliberalism is doing fine. The richer are getting richer and more wealth is



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being created than ever before. The master's tools are continuing to expand the master's house very well. Regrettably, our backs are turned and our attention is not on the system that is brutally appropriating young people to its ever increasing appetites. Instead, we are focused on what is wrong with the young people. Why are they so unhappy, alienated, anxious, depressed, suicidal, prone to drug use, gang affiliation, homicide. It is a nasty bit of smoke and mirrors. A magicians slight of hand that keeps us thinking it is the kids that need fixing.

And so we keep constructing an ever more elaborate systems of care for which we require more and more financial support from the very system that has poisoned the well to start. We continue to build residential programs, group homes, corrections facilities, adolescent in-patient hospital units, counselling centers, runaway and homeless youth programs, foster care programs, drug and alcohol treatment programs, wilderness programs, street outreach services, transitional living programs, suicide prevention programs, gang intervention programs, programs for the survivors of sexual and physical assault, mentorship programs, psychoeducation programs, family therapy programs; the list is ever expanding.

This empire of programs designed to remediate the suffering of young people seems impervious to the fact that the system continues to fail young people inside and outside its reach. Don't get me wrong there are successes: lives saved, addicts in recovery, families reunited, homeless, abused, and neglected young people safely homed, and young people employed. These things do happen thanks to the efforts of CYC workers



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toiling in the belly of the beast. But, as we all know, the successes are too few and the failures too many.

So, what to do? The answer is at once very simple and at the same time inordinately complex. I would argue that we need to quit building institutions designed to fix young people. We might take a page from the work of the anti-psychiatrist Franco Basaglia. Basaglia was the founder of the deinstitutionalization movement that closed the asylums in the late 20th century. As the chief psychiatrist for a large asylum in northern Italy, he determined that asylums were not at all designed to serve the interests of the patients within them. Instead, he argued they served the state by obscuring the suffering of the poor and marginalized by removing them from their communities and hiding them within the asylums. Basaglia felt that if he was to take his mandate of care seriously, as a psychiatrist, he needed to dismantle the very institution of which he was the head.

And so he did. He joined with the patients and gave them open democratic voice in the running of the asylums, he joined with the staff in creating more humane conditions, he joined with community and opened the asylums to anyone who would like to help. Finally, he began the process of emptying the asylums and recentering the work of remediating suffering back to the community. In 1978, he had both emptied asylums across Italy and got a law passed that closed them for good.

Of course, as we know Basaglia's vision for a deinstitutionalized community-based system of care run by and for the patients themselves was quickly co-opted by the community mental health movement. The mental health movement put the professionals firmly back in charge and allowed the state to cut funding so profoundly as to make system of care



essentially dysfunctional. So, there is a caveat here. I would argue that it is important to remember that the struggle is ongoing and that whatever we do it is likely to be coopted and perverted, at least for a time.

That said, in the failure of Basaglia's project there remained sparks that in the 21st century have ignited a whole new generation of psychiatric survivors who are building grass roots alternatives to the mental health system all around the world. I am looking to see if we in CYC have the kind of dedication and courage that would allow us to dismantle the master's house using the tools we share with the young people we encounter in the work we do. It is good work, it is essential work, and it is our legacy for the 21st century.

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The Need for Depth and a Celebration of Performance-based Practices

Kiaras Gharabaghi

Recently I had the unique opportunity to see Yo-Yo Ma, the world famous Chinese-American cellist, in concert. I was no more than 10 meters away from where he was seated on his chair deeply engaged with his cello. Surrounded by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, he played for 45 minutes straight. As I watched, I could clearly see that from his perspective, he was communicating, not just with the audience, but with his cello, profoundly set in a human-non-human relationship. What was readily apparent was the presence of both human and non-human in this relationship, with the audible music representing the relational context and to some degree the inadvertent product of a deep and mutual engagement between the two. Needless to say, it was a spectacular and deeply touching experience.

Over the past year, I have been hearing a lot from colleagues that their students in child and youth care programs (and other human service programs) are behaving badly; that they are communicating rudely; that they are demanding and entitled; and that they seem to have lost respect for professors and for their own role as learners. This, my colleagues, say, is



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different from what it used to be. Sure, there were always some students whose interactions with professors was challenging, but currently, it seems to have taken on a whole new level. Most of my colleague's attribute this to the pandemic, arguing that the two years these students spent in virtual learning contexts may have disabled some normal social skills development processes. This argument is sometimes fine-tuned to include references to changing norms in North American society, driven by the rise of the far right, in which expressions of racism and white supremacy, as well as the individualistic pursuit of entitlement and privilege, have become normalized.

One response to these developments I find particularly worrisome. This response usually involves new student conduct policies, warnings about consequences on course syllabi, and uniting as a faculty team in the response to individual incidents, regardless of context. These kinds of efforts give rise to surveillance mechanisms and disciplinary regimes that I have spent my entire adult life criticizing in the context of youth work, and particularly school-based and residential child and youth care practice. I am devastated that I see the very same dynamics that are common amongst staff teams that have lost their way now emerge amongst the educators of the future staff teams in those settings. I am also disappointed that we seem oblivious to the patterns of colonial practices, where surveillance and disciplinary measures have always, and quite intentionally, disempowered and sometimes directly and severely harmed racialized peoples in disproportionate ways.

On the other hand, I love and respect my colleagues and of course want them to be able to do their job without being treated badly. I know that it is



enormously challenging to deal with rudeness and a lack of respect in a context in which the work of teaching is often already a precarious undertaking with insufficient support resources. So what can be done to avoid the pitfalls of imposing control and containment on the one hand, while strengthening and rendering more positive the experience of my colleagues on the other hand?

Having observed young people before, during and after the pandemic in myriad settings ranging from group homes, to school-based treatment programs and of course post-secondary education settings, both during formal programs (classroom-based teaching in colleges and universities, social skills groups in group homes), as well as in informal contexts (riding the elevator with a group of students, watching youth interact during school lunch hours), I can't help but notice how transactional and instrumental such interactions are. Essentially, it feels to me like social relations have largely been commodified to serve immediate purpose and gratification without any connection to the social world. Even in post-secondary classrooms, where pedagogic methods are creative and often highly engaging, there is a degree of superficiality embedded in both the student-student interactions and the student-teacher/professor interactions. "Excellent point, Miriam", "thanks for contributing, Abdul", "I like your reflections, Kwesi" are the kinds of responses one often hears from the teacher/professor. Nice enough, validating, inviting, but also not particularly meaningful or deep. Quite to the contrary, such responses strike me more as value assessments of a product instead of meaningful engagements, particularly when I often feel that what Miriam said wasn't really an excellent point, and Abdul's contribution was rather minimalist,



and Kwesi's reflection didn't even scratch the surface of what might have been possible.

In saying this, I want to make sure the point is fully understood. I am identifying as superficial not only the emerging youth communication culture, often attributed (without meaningful evidence) to social media usage and excessive use of handheld devices more generally, but also adult (including professor, child and youth worker, social worker) communication cultures. Everywhere I look, what we say and how we say it seems disconnected from the complexity of social relation and the social world. Quick judgments, easy answers, moment-based analysis seems to have crept into our communication culture across generations and pretty much everywhere. Perhaps this is not a surprise; after all, no matter how significant and serious the context, superficiality, non-responses to questions, and empty rhetoric is modeled for all of us by political institutions and governments, band-aid solutions to chronically embedded social problems, and an innovation culture that puts flashy product ahead of meaningful experience and structural change. I am always a little disturbed when even in our field discussions about ethics, racism, and purpose tend to be shorter and less animated than discussions about developing a new logo, a fancy letterhead, or a motto for some new initiative or organization.

So where might we find relief from these emerging trends? I am finding myself increasingly drawn to the world of performance, theatre, music, and the arts more generally. These are the spaces where I can still see a level of depth in relational contexts that speaks to transcending the obvious and connecting across social contexts and worlds. I referenced Yo Yo Ma and



his connection to the cello as a way of exemplifying what can happen in dialogues that are challenging and engaged without seeking outcomes. And I think this level of depth can be replicated in approaches to child and youth care practice, as well as approaches to teaching emerging practitioners (in child and youth care, social work, nursing and other service-oriented fields). Examples of this kind of practice abound; performance arts are especially powerful in the context of trauma-informed work, but this approach extends much beyond such work and includes approaches to advocacy, self-discovery, and social connections. Wolfgang Vachon has been working at the cutting edge of this way of being with youth for many years, and recently produced a series of fictional podcasts with young people that give expression to themes and issues at a level of depth rarely heard in the daily context of residential care, schools, or post-secondary education. Heather Snell has used theatre as the medium for child and youth care practice and has taken to making every speech a performance involving in depth explorations of themes and issues acutely reflective of relational care. Juanita Stephen has used Afrofuturism to create spaces of deep engagement with racism and a future beyond racism through nouveau art and creative design. Peter Amponsah uses drums (specifically West African drumming) to tune into relational spaces with youth that reflect similar kinds of human-nonhuman as well as inter-human connections as Yo-Yo Ma does with his cello.

These are approaches that fit well with - in fact that reconstruct - in a powerful and better way, child and youth care practice. But they must be understood as approaches that undo what is really the worst aspect of our more traditional, talk-oriented practice: They undo the notion that this



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practice flows change from the practitioner to the young person. Change, in whatever form, is as necessary for the practitioner as it is for the young person, because it is not the individuals who are in need of change, but the cultures and contexts in which they co-exist. Furthermore, these approaches to practice allow for challenge, intensity, and depth in ways that our strength-based rhetoric does not. The interdependency and constant co-creation in performance arts pushes everyone to assess and re-assess how they are with one another. There is no room for empty praise or scolding invalidation. The performance moves us, all of us, together, and within that movement, we learn respect, social reflexivity, and relational engagement simply because the movement itself is precisely these things.

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Authentic connection
is not a luxury

it's the **solution** to
many of our troubles.

JAMES FREEMAN, EDITOR



CARING TO CONNECT

NURTURING HOPEFUL,
HEALING RELATIONSHIPS
WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

JAMES FREEMAN
EDITOR

“I love it! I wish I had this year's ago.
I feel I can be even more help to the
young people in my life.” - Tonia



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Problems of the Third Kind

There are three kinds of problems which kids suffer.

First are those which we as adults and professionals cause — when we disappoint or fail young people, when we get impatient or punitive, when we are not care-full and thorough in our upbringing and education tasks. We confuse kids, wreak uncertainty and mistrust where we are supposed to be building and reassuring. These are our problems and we have to do something about them.

The second kind of problems are those which the kids experience as threatening and immobilising — for whatever reason. Young people in special need have their own cues and triggers about things that scare them, and when we recognise these we protect them and help them to overcome their fears. These are also our problems.

The problems of the third kind are not life threatening. They are the daily challenges thrown up by life which the kids bring to us because they would rather not do the work. And we are willing to help because we can and we like to demonstrate our know-how and we want to show that our program is responsive and helpful and because maybe we are uncomfortable with any kind of problem lurking around the place and maybe it buys us a little credit with the kids and anything for a quiet life.

The problems of the third kind are not our problems, and we greatly risk the life curriculum of young people when we play Mr Fixit to their past-due dependencies and avoidances. These problems are the muscle builders of



the children's wills and skills which they need to take home with them, and we cheat them when we say "Let me do that for you."

These are the problems which we listen to but hand back to the kids, asking "What do you think that you can do about that?" This way we affirm their strengths and growth, we convey expectations and possibilities, we express interest and confidence, encourage independence and autonomy.

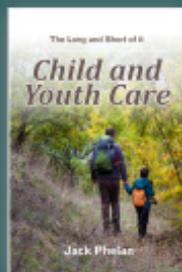
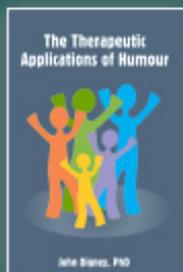
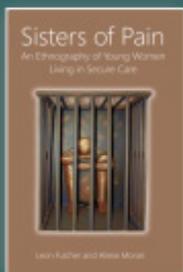
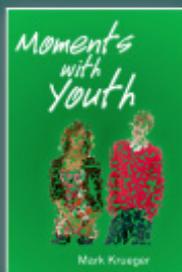
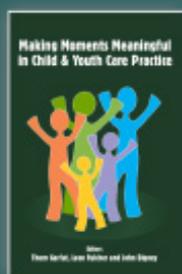
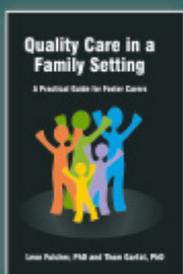
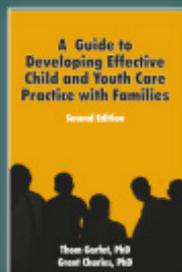
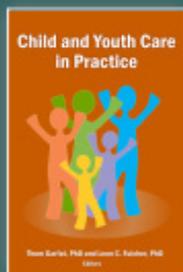
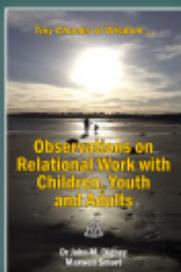
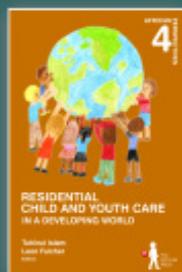
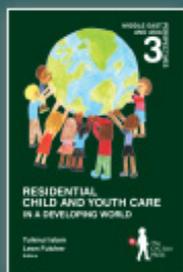
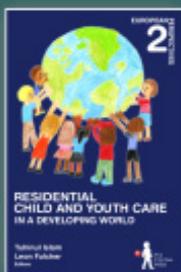
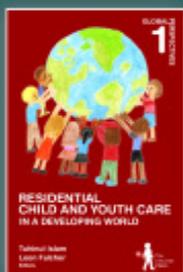
Our experience tells us how to discern a problem of the third kind. It's hard to decide when to say yes and when to say no. In every intervention we know that we must always do as much as is needed and never more than we should. What do you think you can do about that?

From: *CYC Practice Hints I: A collection of practice pointers for work with children, youth and families* by Brian Gannon.

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Postcard from Leon Fulcher

From New Zealand watching the FIFA World Cup in Qatar

Kia Ora Koutou
Katoa and
warm greetings
from New Zealand
where Spring is in the air
and we have had mega
rainstorms and flooding.
There has been much
less flooding here than
has hit Eastern Australia.
As delegates of the world
left Egypt after the world
climate change consultations,
the rest of the World were heading towards
Qatar (Kah-Tar) for football (soccer).



Former head of FIFA, Sepp Blatter, recently said it was a mistake to have Qatar host the World Cup. The event had to be moved in the football calendar to the Winter season and even then, each stadium had to be fully air conditioned. Challenges have been laid by trade unions about the



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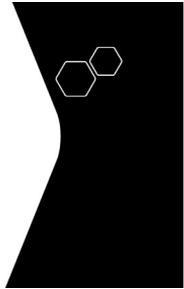
numbers of migrant workers who died in work-related accidents while building facilities.

Other challenges have been raised about Qatari customs and Islamic hadith associated with LBGTQ citizens being contradictory to contemporary football activities elsewhere. Access to beer in the stadiums while watching live football was left open-ended until the day before World Cup play when Budweiser sponsors were advised that alcohol would only be accessed in selective enclosed outlets and hotels. Budweiser have announced that the stockpile of beer will be shipped to the location of the World Cup winners to support their celebrations.



The Beautiful Game (given to football or soccer) was already apparent during the first round of Group play when former Cup holders Argentina lost a tightly fought match against Saudi Arabia. Then the following day, 4-time winners Germany were soundly beaten by underdogs Japan. Such has been the development of football world-wide in recent years that we might anticipate more surprises from the Qatar World Cup as Group play continues into knock-out finals.

Qatar is hosting the most expensive World Cup ever. In a bid to stand out on the world map, the tiny, gas-rich emirate is estimated to have spent up to \$300bn preparing for football's most prestigious event. But being in the spotlight has meant global scrutiny, especially of its human-rights record. Reporters and broadcasters are grappling with how to handle human



Big surprise when Saudi Arabia beat Lionel Messi and Team Argentina: 2-1



Four-time holders Germany engaged in social protest about Qatar social norms



rights concerns, political protests, and unusual restrictions while not missing any action on the pitch. Accommodation is fully booked leaving some fans to commute from Dubai, a short flight away.

And what action we have seen watching World Cup football! I felt for my

Canadian colleagues when their star player had his penalty kick saved by the Belgian goalkeeper and went on to lose their thrilling match 1-0. The team that knocked New Zealand out of the World Cup Qualifying Matches, Costa Rica, were soundly thumped by Spain 7-0 in their first match of Pool play!

I think of visits to residential centres or homes during World Cup football, mostly in the UK and Commonwealth countries, where almost always young people were immersed in



It was a great surprise when Japan defeated top-seeded Germany in Pool A play



Captain of the Portugal team, Cristiano Ronaldo, quit Manchester United FC



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football. Local world cups and football dreams were played out in neighbourhood playgrounds.

The world will follow the performance of 37-year-old Portuguese legend,

Cristiano Ronaldo, who scored as captain his national team after a public split with American owners of the Manchester United football club. Silence surrounds the hosts of the 2018 World Cup – Russia –who are absent throughout the Qatar World Cup affairs through world sanctions.



The World quickly forgets that Russia hosted the FIFA 2018 World Cup!



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