

CYC-Online

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



Child and Youth Care Fragility

The Tipping Point

Promoting Reflective Non-Compliance

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

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In Hope of a More Caring World

James Freeman

*Tell me how to be in this world
Tell me how to breathe in and feel no hurt
Tell me how because I believe in something
I believe in us*

James Bay (British singer & songwriter)

My wife, Julie, and I sat on the patio outside our local Starbucks coffee shop and watched people approach the front door in confusion. It was like watching an ant hill on Grandma's farm after being stepped on. Everyone was turning in different directions with nowhere to go. Starbucks was closed and the caffeine-starved customers didn't know what to do.

Weeks earlier an employee at a Starbucks in Philadelphia (USA) called the police who then arrested two black men for 'loitering' because they had not yet ordered anything. In the aftermath, the corporation decided to close over 8,000 locations for a few hours to focus on racial bias training and discussion with their employees. On the day of the closure, Starbucks posted the following notice on its doors:

At Starbucks we are proud to be a third place – a place between home and work where everyone is welcome. A place where everyone feels that they belong. Today our store is reconnecting with our mission and with



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each other. We are sharing our ideas about how to make Starbucks even more welcoming.

The training may have lacked strong content, but in the words of one employee it provided the opportunity to “communicate with our coworkers about our upbringing and biases, and how to apply that same understanding to customers” (Taylor, 2018).

That same day the star of a major comedy television program tweeted vulgar and racist comments about a black Iranian-American businesswoman and former government official. In an unprecedented move, the television network decided to cancel their highest rated program because of her comments.

Could these examples be public relations stunts? Sure. Do these companies have the power to do so much more to promote respect and social justice? Of course. Both decisions cost the companies millions of US dollars, but that’s in the context of both making billions each year.

Also on my mind have been images of Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein walking in handcuffs after he surrendered to law enforcement last week. He was arrested and indicted on rape, sex abuse and sexual misconduct which could include violence toward hundreds of women. The bravery of many of those victims have spoken up against his horrible actions and sparked the *#metoo* movement.

Just days before the release of this issue of *CYC-Online* reports of racism at a Canadian hockey game also made the headlines. The First Nation Elites team was made up of thirteen and fourteen-year-old kids from Cree, Atikamekw, and Algonquin and other communities from Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia.

The team was called a ‘gang of savages’ by the opposing team members and parents and were taunted with ‘war cries’ from the opposing team by hitting their mouth with their hands and making motions of striking with a tomahawk hatchet. Even with questionable referee calls and poor sportsmanship on the opposing team, the Elites won the first game of the tournament 2-1. Their team huddle after the



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game included their coach explaining that “you are going to face this for the rest of your lives” (Bell, Longchap & Smith, 2018).

Organizers explained that “we just organize the tournament” and it’s “unfortunate [but little we] can do about behaviour on the ice and in the stands...what happens on the ice between young people, we can’t control that” (Bell, Longchap & Smith, 2018). What’s unfortunate is that this hatred and animosity exists in our world.

I was recently reviewing some of the keynote talks from the first CYC World Conference which was wonderfully hosted by the Child and Youth Care Association of Newfoundland and Labrador in 2013. Hundreds of CYCs had gathered together in St. Johns where Gerry Fewster’s message was a highlight for many. Just minutes into his opening session he sounds this clear alarm:

Let’s face it. We’re in big trouble. And the root cause of that trouble is our inability to live together in harmony on this planet. It’s as simple as that. And our kids are caught up in this one. With this backdrop, I can’t think of anything more important than working on the way that we relate with our children in helping them and supporting them to create or co-create a more caring, a more compassionate, and a more peaceful world. (Fewster, 2013)

Think about that. Our purpose is to be together and support one another in ways that create a more caring, compassionate, and peaceful world – one in which we can live together in harmony. Could there be a higher calling in this world? Perhaps some of the strife and discord described above can remind us of the importance of this work.

This June issue of *CYC-Online* has come together with themes of class, privilege, fragility, control, and compliance. Hans Skott-Myhre writes on the messiness of CYC and issues of class and privilege. Wolfgang Vachon highlights our fragility and racial microaggressions. Jack Phelan explores supervision and shifts in thinking



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about safety and external control. Kiaras Gharabaghi challenges us in his usual way to think about the concept of reflective non-compliance. We've also selected a classic from the archives – one that reaches back to 1977 – where Gisela Konopka reminds us of some of the important themes of adolescence. Leon Fulcher also sends us his postcard from New Zealand where he reminds us of the role of language, property, and education in the context of culture.

We're glad you've opened up this issue of *CYC-Online*. I hope you feel it's our way of showing up with you as we all work together toward a more caring world.

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No Perfection, No Purity

Hans Skott-Myhre

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One of the things I admire about Child and Youth Care is how messy it is. To do the work well, one has to have a certain tolerance for ambiguity, indeterminacy, and physical mess. As a result, there is always a tension in the field between institutions and administrators and the work itself. Those responsible for funding and community perceptions of what we do, tend to want facilities that run smoothly with clean common spaces, made beds, washed dishes, and orderly day to day routines. Of course, as anyone who has worked in Child and Youth Care settings knows, these expectations often run counter to the way things really work. In reality, like the rest of life, order and control takes considerable energy to sustain. As Foucault points out, there is no natural social order. Things that we take for granted such as independent living skills, good manners, cleanliness, and moral hygiene are quite particular to an established social order. In fact, we can trace them, as Foucault does in his books, *Discipline and Punish* or *The Order of Things* to the prevailing logic of a particular historical period. That said, the case might well be made that training young people in the morays of social convention is to their benefit. And indeed, that may be true to some degree, but we shouldn't mistake this kind of training as natural or reflective of the "right" way to do things.

Of course, comprehending just how arbitrary the rules of social convention are, can be a bit difficult for those of us raised within the full-on logic of the dominant culture. Like all of us, CYC workers have differing relations to the dominant culture according to the ways in which we are born into bourgeois privilege or are not granted that privilege by birth or geography. The rather random circumstances



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that determine levels of privilege produce significant differences in how we see ourselves, as well as in how we respond to violations of the social order within the institutional frameworks of CYC.

For those of us born into privilege, there is always the possibility of violating social codes without necessarily risking class status. As a result, some workers born to the middle or upper classes may find rebellious behavior mildly attractive or even amusing. However, it is one thing to indulge one's own rebellious inclinations and quite another to engage with a young person's rebellion against you as a CYC worker in an institution. While there is a tendency towards a sympathetic tolerance and permissiveness at first, generally this is a tolerance with limits and those limits may well be reached when there is an assault on one's own sense of privilege. That is, when the rebellion is aimed directly at you. When that happens the middle-class privilege that was always available, but not exercised, can come into full play. In my own experience, I have seen this manifest in complaints of "not feeling safe," alongside calls for disciplinary action to restore "safety."

Other workers born to upper or middle-class status might well have been indoctrinated powerfully into the belief that middle class behaviors such as not swearing, keeping a tidy living space, dressing neatly and modestly, aspiring to work and education to be morally and ethically ordained. These workers truly find rebellious and unconventional behavior unacceptable or to use the more commonly used vernacular, "inappropriate." They often seek to assert their privilege through punitive sanctions and to have a category of young people called "bad kids."

The question of unconventional social behavior for those of us not born into the middle or upper classes holds a different set of coordinates. On the one hand, some of these workers are themselves in full rebellion against what Laurel Richardson calls "stupid rich bastards" in her essay by the same name. There is class resentment and a distrust of administration, snooty intellectuals and what can be seen as a lack of street smarts by their middle-class colleagues. On the other hand, some of their anger also stems from an ambivalent relation to privilege.



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Richardson argues that workers not born into the middle or upper classes don't want to betray their roots by adopting bourgeois values and behaviors. However, they find themselves being pushed by supervisors and peers to, "get a degree", after all "you are smart", and "don't you want a bit more money", or "a bit more respect?" The problem is, the further down this road they go, the more unrecognizable they become to both sides. When they go home, their friends and family are very proud of them. At the same time they are no longer recognized as fully belonging to the neighborhood. On the other side, their bourgeois peers, while they often acknowledge degrees and promotions, don't necessarily accept them as fully privileged either.

Richardson, talking about this in her own journey from very poor blue-collar roots to becoming a professor, describes how she never could really hide her roots and merge seamlessly into the white-collar world. Her roots were always showing in the minor violations of behavior that she simply couldn't seem to eradicate. She was often seen in faculty meetings as a bit rough around the edges, a bit too blunt and not nearly genteel enough. Of course, in CYC we might argue that this doesn't hold true. We are inherently less polished, more blunt etc. But, if we look closely at the micropolitics within our agencies and calls for professionalization, we might well see some of this class warfare at play.

There is another group of non-middle-class workers who hold a related but different set of concerns. These workers come from backgrounds of such desperation and violence that it is essential to them that they never return to their roots. These workers cling to the hope and dream of bourgeois privilege like a life raft in a storm. For them, to aspire to bourgeois belonging is an act of survival.

Unconventional behavior by young people for both of these sets of what might be called proletarian workers is a double-edged sword. Rebellion is understood as reasonable and necessary, but also dangerous. These workers understand what can be at stake in challenging the system and how much can be lost. In working in an institutional setting that is understood at a visceral level to be alien to one's roots, these workers are truly culture brokers or what Gloria



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Anzaldúa calls border dwellers. When rule breaking occurs, they understand at some level that enforcing the rules is an ambivalent action. To some degree it stands to inoculate non-middle class young people from the worst judgements of the dominant society. On the other side though, enforcing middle class morays is to some degree always a betrayal. For these workers, young people's anger and sense of being let down by staff they trusted to be on their side, is anything but theoretical. It is very probably in line with their own lived experience, not just historically, but as class, race and gender affects their lives now.

Obviously, this is all very messy and the categories and portrayals I have delineated above are painted with broad brush strokes. The actuality is far more nuanced and filled with idiosyncratic variables of lived experience and personal capacity. CYC workers, like all of us, are full of exceptions to the rule. However, in the portrait I have drawn of workers driven by class, there is an acknowledgment that who we are as workers plays deeply into how we respond to the young people we engage in day to day work. Too often, our attention is focused on who these young people are, their backgrounds, traumas, aspirations, frustrations and contradictions. We pay less attention to who we are and how our own upbringing and social context might shape our responses to the actions of the young people we encounter.

As workers, there are so many aspects of our lives that we are encouraged to leave behind at the door to the facility. When we come to work, we are encouraged to take on a CYC worker persona that might well include strong prohibitions against sharing details of our lives with the young people with whom we work. Fortunately, there is less sanction about sharing our lives with each other. Indeed, oftentimes one of the real joys of working in CYC is the life-long friendships forged through support and sharing with our colleagues. However, this deeply relational aspect of our work lives is generally walled off from meetings, case planning and, too frequently, supervision. We are supposed to act professionally at all times and keep the messy details of our lives off the floor and out of the administrative suite.



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I would argue that this places profound limits on our capacities as workers dedicated to relational practice. How are we to form relationships with young people if we are only marginally present in terms of who we are and how we live? For most of us, there is very little room in the formal aspects of our work for exploring how who we are and how we were raised plays into the ways we behave at work. The profound impact of our lived experience on the work we do is sidelined into the occasional personal growth retreat/seminar or referral to therapy by supervisors who worry that our lives might be leaking into our work.

There is a dehumanizing aspect to this refusal to acknowledge the totality of who we are in the work place and a massive contradiction to the principles of CYC work that we valorize as essential for the health and well-being of young people. We are, like the young people we encounter, composed out of the world of experience that shapes us and through which we shape ourselves. However, the institutions in which we labor perform an odd trick of perspective that alienates us from the young people who are the *raison d'être* for the entire endeavor.

That trick is to convince us that we are somehow distinctly different from young people and that it is important that these differences are understood and enforced. It is a colonial logic that insists that we never “go native,” but maintain our separation from the strange culture of adolescence or childhood. Like the colonist who asserts their European nationalist superiority by sustaining the dress and lifestyle of their home country, we must always act the part of the adult.

Of course, to be the adult denies large portions of who we are. We are not adults. That is far too limiting a description. It is a social prescription that is designed to enforce certain habits and behaviors largely designed to promote disciplinary limitations on our speech, dress, comportment and so on. It is to some degree a denial of the full creative living force that is our actual birthright. I would argue that we are messier than that.

As Karen Borod would have it, in her stunning work that merges quantum physics and feminism, we are an entanglement. That is to say, we are composed of a shifting compositional field so rich in capacity as to be unimaginable in scope and



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possibility. Like the complex array of class privilege, resentment and aspiration with which I began, we are neither pure nor perfect. Indeed, when we attempt to measure ourselves against social standards and categories, we will always fail to make the grade. I would argue that this kind of failure is wonderful. It means that we have not been fully automatized into the machinery of our contemporary society. To be messy, indeterminate entanglements of life is to fail at being an adult. Regrettably, many of us take that failure as a bad thing and spend much of our lives trying to succeed at killing that aspect of us that is most alive. Worse, we allow our institutions to perpetuate that lethal attack on our spirit to permeate our relations with each other.

CYC has foundations in philosophical traditions such as phenomenology, existentialism and humanism that offer alternatives to this denial of our humanity. It is also evolving powerful antidotes through incorporating feminist, Indigenous, and critical perspectives to help understand who we are and not just what we do. Our work is a living tradition that has the capacity to affirm the vitality of struggle and messy creativity. It gives us tools to undo purity and perfection and open ourselves onto the field of living relations. I would argue that this is a legacy worth passing on through our engagement with young people in the work we do and the lives we lead.



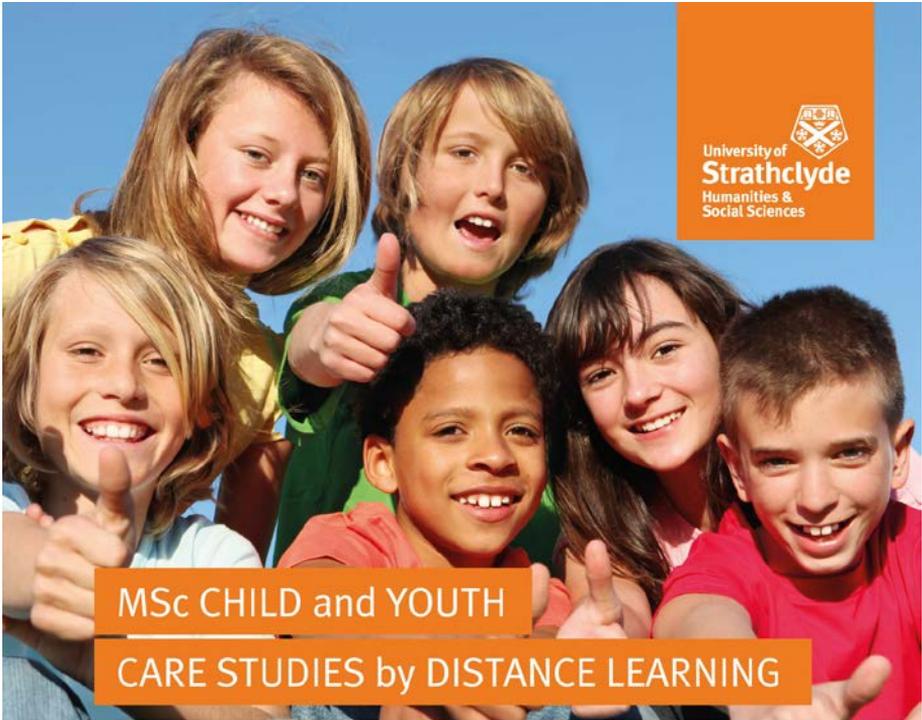
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Child and Youth Care Fragility

Wolfgang Vachon

I'm writing this having just returned from the Canadian Child and Youth Care (CYC) conference in Richmond, British Columbia. A huge shout out to the CYC Association of BC for all their hard work, for making reconciliation one of the core themes, for having youth and Indigenous keynote speakers, and an opening keynote which explicitly addressed privilege and imperfect allyship.

I have never seen a CYC conference program with so many sessions on issues of race, privilege, lived experience, and whiteness. I have also never had more troubling conversations about race and been witness to, and complicit in, so many micro-aggressions at any CYC conference I've attended. I'm certain these micro-aggressions have been happening at conferences for decades. Yet, I'm only becoming aware of them as I continue to learn, be more attentive, and, I expect, because there was a strong presence of Indigenous, Black and other people of colour attending.

Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, and Esquilin, 2007, p. 271).



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Microaggressions are the (apparently) interminable acts of violence that people in positions of privilege commit, often non-consciously, towards minoritized others. “Little” moments that happen, daily, hourly, endlessly. They’re frequently not noted by those of us who hold white privilege (like myself), and we’re often uncomfortable, defensive, and dismissive when confronted on them. While this essay focuses upon racial microaggressions, they can, and do, exist across multiple sites of power differentials, such as ability and genders. They can also take place within ethno-racial groups (as Tobin McPherson made apparent in his workshop), and across racialized groups (as Dr. Beverly-Jean Daniel reminded me).

In order to ground this piece in the concrete, I’d like to provide some examples of microaggressions that took place at the conference. I provide these not to commit additional acts of violence (although, I worry example two does exactly that) but rather, to illustrate for those of us who have a hard time seeing them, in the moment:

1. Two colleagues are talking, one white one black, a third person joins the conversation, also white. All three teach post-secondary CYC. The black colleague is introduced as being at such and such a school, the white colleague asks what they are studying.
2. In a workshop discussing race, a white participant, a college professor, talks about lighting in film and says, in a room where at least half the people are Black, Indigenous, or a person of colour, “historically, film lighting is so bad that black people look like shit”. Nothing is said about the comment, the facilitator, a black man, redirects the conversation.
3. White colleagues “complaining” about how many sessions there were at the conference on race related issues.

While each of these could be rationalized, and in isolation might seem like “not such a big deal”, they are a big deal, and they are not isolated. Microaggressions act cumulatively, one after the other, incident upon incident, year after year after year. Indeed, the three situations above are only a few examples. There were others,



some of which I'm not identifying here, because they're still in the process of being addressed. And addressing them is what must happen. It is my responsibility to go back to my white colleagues and speak with them, regardless of how uncomfortable this may be for me. My disquiet is not (at all) equivalent to the reality faced on a daily basis by Indigenous, Black, and CYCs of colour, nor what is experienced by the racialized children, youth, and families we work with.

Many years ago, I heard the term "calling people in", as opposed to calling people out. The idea is that rather than shaming or embarrassing people, we create a dialogue to address our own oppressive behaviours. This is done when those in positions of power, such as white folks, "gather their people" in order to confront racism, including microaggressions, when they happen. What this looks like in practice is having conversations about whiteness, asking our white colleagues about our own racism, addressing one's own racism when it is pointed out, and recognizing that racism exists within us. Let me provide you with another example. A colleague of mine, who is white, spoke to me about a situation they were struggling with related to race. When we spoke, they stated "I'm not sure if this is my own white fragility", and they relayed the story. I listened in that moment. I reflected upon the story over the evening, and the next day I went back to them and said, I thought it was their white fragility, I told them why I thought so, and then we spoke about allyship and addressing racism.

White fragility is the way that white people take up space, energy, and time, in our defensive reactions to situations of our own racism.

White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium (DiAngelo, 2011, p.54).



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CYC has been called a field “that remains profoundly white at all levels” (Gharabaghi, 2017, p.7) and while I have some critiques of this claim (such as, how this statement might make invisible all the labour done by people with racialized bodies in CYC), what is true in this statement, is that our epistemologies, policies, and writing is predominantly created within and ascribes to whiteness. This can be seen in many of the theories we draw upon (from developmental psychology, to systems theory, through post-structuralism, right up to the “post-humanist turn”), who teaches at Canadian post-secondary institutions, the (limited) research done, and what is published in CYC literature.

When “we” say “we” are “too white” and then call for action to address this, “we” must be prepared to change. It is uncomfortable and difficult to be called in on racism. I can become defensive, intellectualize my actions, and feel shame. At times I want to justify, argue, and I *wish* I was “less racist”. This is my white fragility. And I resist it by stopping, listening, and reflecting. Then I reach out to other white people (specifically, white allies doing anti-racism and anti-oppression work) and I talk, I read (there are huge amounts written on this for white people who want to learn more) and then, maybe, depending on the situation, I reach out to racialized people. It is not the responsibility of Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour to educate me, it is my responsibility to learn from all the work already done by racialized people, and to work with other white people to educate one another.

Unfortunately, the one workshop I was aware of at the National Conference by a white person addressing whiteness was cancelled. I know that work is being done by white people in Child and Youth Care looking at racism in our field, I also know that the majority of work is not being done by white people. It is being done by people of colour, Black, and Indigenous CYCs. It is the responsibility of white people to listen when racialized people offer to educate us. It is the responsibility of white people to call each other in, when we see racism. It is the responsibility of white people to read, watch, write, think, and talk with each other about racism. A few of the many authors that I have found particularly useful in my thinking about race include Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Sara Ahmed, and Ta-Nehisi Coates (among



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dozens of others). There are not many people in CYC who explicitly write about race and identify themselves as racialized, Sandrina de Finney is one who has been writing about the impact of colonialism on CYC, practitioners, and those we work with for several years. There is however an emerging body of literature from racialized authors in CYC that explicitly addresses our own racism, some Canadian examples include Jaspreet Ball, Jin-Sun Yoon, Saira Batasar-Johnie, and Tanitia Munroe, among others. And, of course, we can always attend conference sessions.

In addressing the racism and white fragility (including my own) I was part of at the conference, I've been struck with the humility, gratitude, and apparent willingness of those I've spoken with to address this topic in their own actions. Things are slowly moving on a structural level, this is happening in some of the hiring done in post-secondary institutions, conference program sessions, some of the writing being published, and some people's willingness to look at their own whiteness. Much (much) more needs to be done; what these changes show me though is that it can be done. Policies can change. Hiring can change. Conferences can change. CYC can change.

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The Tipping Point

Jack Phelan

When people first begin their careers in CYC practice, there is a natural focus on safety as an overriding concern. Particularly in the first six months of practice experience, the new worker is overly focused on keeping himself safe, both physically and emotionally. This preoccupation with competence anxiety gradually reduces as professional confidence increases. The obvious manifestation of this struggle is an over use of external control to manage the environment, the youth and families. New staff rely on rule enforcement, punishment and rigid structure to get through the day safely.

Thick personal boundaries and adherence to the schedule are recommended guidelines for practitioners in the first year of experience. Family support workers, school CYC practitioners, community youth work staff as well as residential practitioners all feel more comfortable when they are in charge of things through the imposition of external control. Punishment becomes an easy way to maintain this sense of being in control and threatening to impose “consequences” is regularly used to manage behavior. I believe that the axiom “Punishment reduces staff anxiety” can be applied to most new workers as they navigate the first year of practice.

It is interesting to note that new supervisors also have this safety focus and use external control to manage their own comfort. Micro-managing is a prevalent and generally annoying characteristic of newly appointed supervisors.

We know that being safe is a prerequisite for any learning and significant change to occur, but too much emphasis on staying safe also keeps people from developing the skills needed to be successful in life. The desired state of affairs is a balance achieved between being safe enough to learn and having enough freedom to risk



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and build competence. The French word “milieu”, which is often used to describe the CYC environment, actually translates as the middle, or balancing point. I believe a therapeutic milieu is actually a healthy balance of external control to achieve safety and the freedom to use choice and personal power to learn. The more a person is able to be safe, the more personal freedom they need to exert.

When a CYC practitioner becomes more competent and confident in her ability to make good decisions and professional judgements, her safety focus is greatly reduced and there is a corresponding increase in her ability to reduce external control approaches in her practice. This developmental maturation is a critical issue for professional growth, because it is not until safety becomes a background rather than a foreground issue that CYC work can be truly effective.

Kiaras Gharabaghi, among other recent writers, describes this preoccupation with external control and safety as a major detriment, especially in residential programs. Family support programs also struggle with the need to be too controlling with parents who must learn how to manage their lives without external intervention.

Experienced supervisors look back with amusement at their early attempts to micro-manage staff and program expectations. Effective supervisors have learned to trust practitioners at different levels of development to decide things on their own.

I would like to suggest that there is a point in a practitioner’s professional career where he actually feels this shift happening. Concern about safety becomes less important and the need to trust others to make their own decisions becomes the agenda. I have described this as moving from Level 1 to Level 2 in development and I believe that this is the place where professional CYC practice begins. Relational energy replaces external control as a method to motivate and support people, and accurate developmental assessment replaces rules and routines to determine the need for control.

Supervisors also experience this shift, beginning to trust that staff want to become more competent, and that fewer rules and guidelines, coupled with relational connections, are now indicated.



There are many factors which influence the journey toward this “tipping point”, and some practitioners never reach this critical juncture. Competent supervision, which supports and acknowledges the initial need for a focus on safety and yet challenges the emerging professional to reduce this focus at the appropriate time (usually after one year), is a critical factor. Personal commitment to professional growth is also a requirement, although external support and role models are necessary. Programs that emphasize safety and control above all else will not support new practitioners to make this journey, which is very unfortunate, and the reason why we see many very experienced practitioners still stuck in poor practice behaviors.

This shift in thinking about safety and external control can be termed a threshold concept for professional development, and it is both transformative and irreversible. This means that once you have passed this tipping point in your development, you cannot really ever go back to thinking the way you had before. A focus on achieving this vantage point may be a useful agenda for both supervisors and individual practitioners.

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Promoting Reflective Non-Compliance

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Let me start with the simple proposition that compliance requires not skill but an abdication of autonomous capacity. In promoting compliance, whether it is at the trivial level of following rules of a program, or at the more profound level of ‘becoming a pro-social citizen’, we are not teaching or imparting skills on young people. Instead, we are waging a war of attrition, breaking down whatever capacity for resistance a young person may have had and imposing a well-intended but entirely disempowering identity – one that, based on our own lived experience, is likely to reap the rewards of becoming ‘a nobody in particular’. In the radical psycho-analytical perspective that served as a precursor to what is today Critical Race Theory, Fanon described this process as ‘seeking whiteness’; a way of mitigating otherness and seeking power through subjugation. One might describe this today as the post-colonial movement of on-going oppression.

But here I go making matters much more complicated than they actually are. My point is simply this: we spend an enormous amount of time as child and youth care practitioners trying to promote particular kinds of skills for young people. We do this because we can associate certain skills with success in related areas. For example, we often speak of life skills, social skills, emotional self-management skills, anger management skills, financial literacy skills, nutrition and health skills, and so on. These skills are meant to allow young people to complete tasks that seem important and that range from cooking for themselves to opening bank accounts, finding housing, writing resumes, resolving conflict, and many more.

I don’t want to suggest that these kinds of skills aren’t useful. They certainly are and young people have to learn them somehow. If there is one thing we can be



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sure of, however, it is that in spite of having spent the time to teach these skills, often under the threat of consequences for non-participation, young people frequently don't apply them. In fact, we know that many of the young people we work with as child and youth care practitioners continue to get angry in spite of having completed a 12-part anger management program. They still eat donuts, chocolate bars and chips despite having learned about healthy nutrition. They find themselves homeless despite having been shown how to find housing, and they are often unemployed in spite of having produced perfectly fine resumes.

These simple facts point to a much larger process that I think we have largely neglected in our practices. Young people are often non-compliant. Whatever it is we think they ought to do is not what they actually do. It is not just the young people we work with – non-compliance is a marker of youth; it is the instruction manual for how to be young. The point is that we know that the young people we work with will engage in non-compliance frequently and with full commitment. We know this before we even start our work with them. We know this because it is their job to be non-compliant at least as often as being compliant.

This raises an obvious question: *Why don't we coach young people how to be non-compliant well?* If we accept that non-compliance is a typical part of growing up and characterizes at least some conduct of most young people for most of their youth (so say between the ages of 2 and 29), we cannot construct non-compliance as a negative thing. That would be the equivalent of saying sex is negative, or dating, or turning to or abandoning religion. In fact, this would suggest that a binary construction of compliance as good and non-compliance as bad is not really applicable or appropriate, and if that is the case, it must, logically, be possible to do non-compliance *well*. Yes, I mean to say that it must be possible to be really good at non-compliance, and by being good at it, to achieve better outcomes than one would if one were bad at it.

We have of course always known that compliance/non-compliance cannot be constructed as a simple binary. If we say that compliance is better than non-compliance, we would accept the idea that young people being pressured/coerced



into participation in the sex trades, for example, are better off complying than not complying with that pressure/coercion. Lorraine Fox wrote about this problem 25 years ago in her now classic piece “The Catastrophe of Compliance”. We have never actually said that compliance is better than non-compliance. What we have said is that compliance with ‘legitimate’ authority figures is better than non-compliance with those authority figures, but non-compliance with anti-social peers, destructive parents, crime-ridden communities, etc. is better than compliance with these. If that sounds confusing to you, imagine how confusing that is to a young person!

It so happens that the demand for compliance with authority figures often turns out to be a demand for compliance with whiteness. Most authority in the global North is derived from whiteness. Particularly in the context of Black Youth, Indigenous Youth and racialized youth, therefore, not contributing to their non-compliance skills amounts to withholding from these young people the skills necessary to resist their whitening. I suppose one might extend this argument also to Trans youth in the context of cis-gendered norms, young people identifying as LGBTQ2s++ in the context of heterosexist norms, autistic young people in the context of neuro-typical norms, young people with disabilities in the context of ablelist norms, and so on.

The reality is that non-compliance is often necessary to maintain one’s sense of Self as well as one’s cultural and ethno-racial identity, and also to resist the never-ending pressure to conform to the broader norms and expectations of whiteness. But how can young people learn and practice to do non-compliance well?

I think there is transformative potential embedded in this question. We have constructed the task of child and youth care practice as fundamentally compliance-oriented. In practice, this orientation is often simplified to literally mean compliance with rules and staff and program demands. Even theoretically, however, a much more nuanced concept of compliance is deeply embedded in our relational practice, which presume a common understanding of ‘the relational’, derived from



a universal lived experience of the tensions between belonging and isolation, intersubjectivity and objectification.

To address the fallacies in these assumptions, I think we would do well to consider a focus on coaching young people toward reflective non-compliance. By reflective non-compliance I mean the opposite of behavioural non-compliance, which is characterized by rejecting authority as a matter of principle. This tends to get young people in trouble and likely has been at the root of many of their negative and sometimes life-altering experiences, such as incarcerations, school failure and social isolation. Reflective non-compliance is distinguished from behavioural non-compliance primarily in its centering of the young person as an autonomous decision-maker with real impact. It promotes the idea that young people can weigh the implications of their responses to particular circumstances on a spectrum of compliance (from 'no thank you' to 'but yes, of course'), without *a priori* constructing compliance as the best possible option. And it shifts agency from the professional construction of what is right to a personally relevant construction of right and wrong based on the reflective process unique to each young person. For some young people, this may mean that the protection of racial or sexual identity take precedence over functional outcomes in a given moment; for others, the instrumental benefits of being offered a spot in a supportive housing program may warrant some level of compromise with respect to their compliance with whatever sort of expectations expressed by 'authority'.

This level of pragmatism and a vigorous pursuit of self interest (a taken-for-granted privilege in a white context) require specific skills. Many young people we work with don't know how to say 'no thank you' without burning bridges. Often, young people don't know how to integrate non-compliance with meaningful relationships with people they like and respect, and therefore move to first destroy those relationships *in order to be able to be* non-compliant. I believe that we have largely ignored our responsibility to coach young people in effective ways to reject what we have to offer without also rejecting us (by which I mean CYCs and more generally helping professions).



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Doing non-compliance *well* is a prerequisite for developing an autonomous sense of Self. I think Child and Youth Care practice, as a matter of professional purpose, should integrate non-compliance skills into our repertoire of skill-transfer to the young people we work with.

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Ready or Not: Youth Aging Out of Care

Eva Nardella Wiseman

Abstract

This review examines literature pertaining to youth leaving the care of various child welfare systems in North America, as well as around the world. The literature review will discuss the following areas: (a) risk factors and protective factors associated with leaving care; (b) youths' perspectives on leaving care; (c) positive and negative outcomes for these youth; (d) a review of after care services; and (e) connections to the field of child and youth care.

The transition to adult life is tough for many youth, and this is particularly true for youth who age out of care. Children and youth who are in care have been placed in living situations outside of their natural family because the child has been deemed *in need of protection*. Once a child under the protection of the system reaches the legal age of adulthood the system no longer has any obligations. This literature review examined existing research on youth who are aging out of the child welfare system to determine what influences this transition. The transition is one which most youth in care face on their own (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006).

In 2004, in Ontario, there were over 19,000 children in care. This represents an increase of 65% since 1998. In the United States, over 21,000 youth transition into adulthood from foster care on a yearly basis (Pecora, Kessler, O'Brian, White, Williams, Hiripi, White, & Herrick, 2006). The transition from being in care usually occurs once a youth is 16 or 18 years of age, though many youth are offered after care services, often up to the age of 21. The youth who "age out" of care are



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wards of the state, which means that in Ontario they are a “Permanent” or “Crown” Ward. A child becomes a permanent ward when their natural parents surrender all existing rights and responsibilities to the local child welfare authority. These children and youth are placed in foster homes, group homes, or residential treatment centres (Twedde, 2005). Pecora et al. (2006a) offer a more specific list of the living situations that former foster youth, youth leaving care, and youth ‘aging out’ of the system have experienced:

- Initial shelter care
- Foster care
- Kinship care
- Treatment foster care
- Group homes
- Residential treatment
- Independent living placements
- Adoptions
- Juvenile justice placements once youth is under child welfare agency supervision (not as an initial placement) (p. 1446)

Youth “leaving care” have moved out of one of the above living situations (many have endured many different placements) under the supervision of a child welfare agency. The term “age out” is used when a youth is at the age at which the child welfare agency is no longer legally obligated to care for the youth. This age varies depending on the agency and location (English, Morreale, & Larsen, 2003) though in most jurisdictions it is now the legal age of “adulthood” (18, 19 or 21 years). These terms are commonly used in the literature to describe the issues youth in care experience as they leave and are no longer eligible to receive services.



Methodology

To review literature on this topic, the following databases were searched: PsycINFO, ProQuest, Scholars Portal, Elsevier Science Direct, Sage Full-text Collections, and Academic Search Premier using the keywords: 'youth in care,' 'youth leaving care,' 'foster youth,' and 'leaving care.' Google scholar and Google search were also used to find literature that could not be found through the databases, such as reports published by welfare agencies. Most of the literature included in this review is from 2003–2007, and all literature was published after 1989. Only articles referring to youth leaving care because of aging out of the system were reviewed. While the primary focus was Canadian and American literature, there is a small portion of material that had been published outside of North America, which was relevant. The discussion of this literature review is organized around the following main ideas: youths perspectives, protective factors, risk factors, supportive outcomes for these youth, negative outcomes, after care services, implications for practice, and connections to the child and youth care field.

Youths' perspectives on leaving care

Tweddle (2005) found that Canadian youth aging out of care identified crucial needs such as the need for ongoing supportive relationships, peer support, independent living training, and greater access to financial support, and support in gaining access to education, employment, and training programs. Daining and DePanfils (2007) found that youth desired help with managing their money as well as in areas of housing. Life skills training includes teaching tangible, everyday living skills, such as getting and keeping a job, applying for college, opening a bank account, etc. Intangible skills are also of importance and include social skills, making decisions, communicating, etc. Youth spoke primarily about tangible skills. Intangible skills are much harder to measure than tangible ones and are less likely to be reported by youth. (Propp, Ortega, & NewHeart, 2003; Schiff, 2006).

Youth from the Pape Adolescent Resource Centre in Toronto described being 'cut off' from care at 18 or 19, and being unprepared and unready for the transition



(Tweddle, 2005). In two different studies involving focus groups youth who have left care in Ontario have identified:

- A need for a street outreach service that is part of CAS. Many youth on the street were in care, more support is needed to help bridge the gap from life in a placement to independence.
- There needs to be a service like PARC everywhere in the province. This service would allow youth to make use of it and contribute to it with no cut off age.
- There should be an info line/warning line that youth in care can call when rights are violated, a line for youth in and from care with mental health issues.
- There should be a training program available for youth in care. Teaching life skills to youth much younger than 15 years of age, perhaps taught by older youth in care who would like to contribute.
- Lower caseloads for social workers.
- ID clinic for youth in care.
- Youth In Care should have a Child and Youth Worker assigned to them in addition to their social worker.
- Training programs for workers about what resources are available for youth both inside and outside the agency. e.g. some of us have been told about services that do not exist or have not been told about services that do not exist.
- ECM for youth who have entered into an extended care and maintenance agreement, health and dental care should be required.
- Steady friends and mentors.
- Information package for youth leaving care outlining details on financial entitlement and available services. (Ontario Children's Aid Societies, 2006, p.8; Tweddle, 2005, p. 24)



Freundlich, Avery, Gerstenzang, and Munson, (2006b) interviewed young adults about their experiences in care as they relate to transitioning out of the welfare system. One of the interviewees stated:

A lot of people have this misconception like, Oh, they're too old, they're gonna age out, they don't need really need [permanency] and stuff like that. Although most [youth] say they don't want it, ask [them] when they get older, [and they say] "You know, I wish I had somebody for me" (p. 365).

Youth leaving care say they need lasting supportive relationships with people they find significant, and not just when the transition takes place, but afterwards as well (Tweedle, 2005).

There is a link between what youth said they need and what the research says is of importance. The significance of the needs identified by youth formerly in care is discussed in further detail below in relation to the positive outcomes that youth who are provided with these supports experience.

Programs to Support Positive Outcomes

This section describes the results of programs in mentoring, education and life skills training designed to provide youth with an increased chance of success for the transition out of care.

Support and mentoring

"Counting on others is not only normal, but it also provides the context for healthy growth and development" (Propp et al., 2003, p. 263). Youth in care need reinforcement to be able to realize that leaning on others in times of need is not something to be ashamed of. With all the emphasis placed on doing things on one's own, there should also be a strong focus to ensure that youth understand when to



ask for help when it is appropriate. Additionally, maintaining connections for support is an area in which youth should be skilled (Propp et al., 2003).

Ongoing mentor relationships can be maintained through formal programs or informal extended family support. In Canada, The National Youth in Care Network has been instrumental in voicing the concerns of youth who have recently left care. They are focused on “breaking this cycle of poverty, exclusion and dysfunction to create a better future for Canadian society” (National Youth in Care Network, 2007). Groups such as The National Youth in Care Network are key to providing advocacy and emotional peer support (Mendes, 2005). In a Midwest study done in the United States, it was found that many young adults had ongoing relationships with members of their natural family, such as grandparents (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006).

Mentoring can take many forms, such as one-to-one mentoring, group mentoring, team mentoring, and peer mentoring (Osterling & Hines, 2006). Osterling & Hines focused partially on one-to-one mentoring in their research. Findings included: “mentors can buffer youth from poor outcomes by (1) providing a supportive and trusting relationship, (2) serving as a role model, and (3) assisting youth in acquiring independent living skills” (p. 243). “When the mentoring relationship does persist, youth in foster care may be particularly likely to benefit from these relationships ...after 12 months of participation in a mentoring programme, foster youth exhibited improved social skills, improved ability to trust adults, improvements in pro-social support and self-esteem enhancement compared with non-foster youth” (p.244). There are many more positive benefits to serve the youth, some of which include an increase in self-concept, increase in educational attainment, decrease in use of drugs and alcohol, decrease of violent behaviour, and improved relationships with parental figures.

Independent living skills training

Independent living skills training has a positive impact on success (Children’s Advocate, 2007; Farruggia, 2006; Montgomery, Donkoh and Underhill, , Donkoh



and Underhill, 2006; and Propp, et.al.,2003), Clare (2006) comments that practical success is subject to an individual's ability to attain basic life skills in order to meet the demands of work, school, home, and the community. According to Clare (2006), these are all areas in which youth leaving care need to develop skill areas in order to be successful on their own.

Montgomery, Donkoh and Underhill (2006) describe independent living programs, in which youth take part in social skills training, personal development, and independent living training, all when living in a supervised living space in which their skills can be practiced. Topics may vary from program-to-program, but overall can include learning about anything from budgeting to getting help with legal matters. These services also give the option for youth to continue services after leaving care. There is insufficient data to confirm the long term success of these programs, although the data that was available found, "statistically significant protective effects" (Montgomery, Donkoh and Underhill, 2006, p. 1443).

Education

Many youth leave care with a substantial lack of education. Youth who stay in care past the age of majority are more likely to graduate high school and also more likely to go on to higher education (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Montgomery, Donkoh and Underhill, 2006). Since many youth in care don't graduate before 18, being in care for a longer period of time allows them the opportunity to be able to make up for the educational shortfalls they may have encountered because of their history. Some youth are making their way to becoming college graduates and others have been sustaining long term employment and living quarters (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). Youth with mentors close to their age who have completed secondary school and have gone on to higher education can prove to be very influential towards future educational attainment for the youth they mentor (Osterling & Hines, 2006).



Protective factors

When youth leave care, the protective factors associated with resilience can facilitate greater likelihood of success. Individual factors typically associated with resilience include: intelligence, social skills, self-esteem, locus of control, empathy, faith and hope. Family factors correlated with resilience among children are: supportive, affective ties in [foster] family, positive expectations of the child, a democratic parenting style, parent's mental health and connections with the extended family network. Environmental factors include ties with "prosocial" adults and attending an institution that offers support for competencies, determination and a sense of meaning. (Drapeau, Saint-Jacques, Lepine, Begin, and Bernard, 2007, p. 979)

Drapeau et al. (2007) discuss how to assist youth leaving care by providing opportunities for youth to develop protective factors to assist with the transition. This includes ties with adults, for example a foster parent, a volunteer, or a child and youth worker for a substantial amount of time. McCubbin, O'Brien, and Pecora (2007a) incorporated four protective factors in their interview questions to former youth in care to gauge the development of relationships. These questions included:

- Did the child/youth feel loved when they were in foster care?
- Did the child/youth feel the foster parents were helpful to them?
- Did they have a close relationship with an adult for the greater part of their childhood?
- Did the child/youth utilize various mental health services such as counseling when in foster care?

These youth were also asked questions in relation to education, such as whether they had used tutoring, took part in independent living group/workshops, or enrolled in special education or gifted education programs. Ancil et al (2007a) found that a positive placement history, which includes high foster care placement



stability and low number of failed reunifications, as well as having a wide range of preparation for independent living and steady resources significantly lowered the chances that youth would experience negative outcomes. One must also consider related risk factors for this population, as discussed in the following section.

Risk factors

“Risk factors are variables that may predict alumni [youth who have left care] outcomes” (Pecora et al. 2006a, p. 1467). Being in care is a risk factor for a variety of poor outcomes that youth in transition experience (Jahnukainen, 2007).

A substantial body of evidence suggests that young people leaving public care systems are at increased risk for low educational attainment, unemployment, homelessness, physical and mental health difficulties, dependency on public assistance, and involvement with the criminal justice system. (Montgomery, Donkoh and Underhill, 2006, p. 1435.)

Ancil et al. (2007b) also found these youth had lower earnings, and a higher rate of homelessness than the general population. In addition, it has been observed when a youth leaves care at a younger age, for example at the age of 18 instead of 21 the risk of these less desirable outcomes is higher. The consequence of these outcomes is poor well-being and low self-sufficiency during young adulthood (Farruggia, 2006). Overall, the transition out of care is more difficult for young women than young men – consequently, these young women should be allowed an even greater time to prepare (Schiff, 2006).

Negative outcomes

Youth making the transition from group care facilities to the community generally perform poorly (Jahnukainen, 2006). These poor outcomes can include: reliance on social assistance, poor educational attainment, poor social support systems, involvement with drugs and the justice system, and early parenthood (Farruggia, 2006; Jahnukainen, 2007; Osterling & Hines, 2006). According to Farruggia (2006), “foster care youth often lack the financial backing, extensive social



networks, and support services needed in a complex, rapidly changing society” (p. 2).

Income support

Studies repeatedly find that youth who have transitioned out of care are more likely to require income support. Cook (1991) found that two and a half to four years after youth aged out of care, only 17% were entirely self-supporting (meaning not receiving any form of social assistance). Hollander et al. (2007) states that all the former foster youth in the study had a higher rate of dependency assistance in comparison to the general public. Hollander et. al. (2007) also found that all former foster youth in their study were more likely (than the general public) to be dependent on social assistance. Many of the youth leaving care were not able to sustain proper living arrangements without the help of government assistance. Courtney and Dworsky (2006) found that almost one half of the female participants, and just about one fourth of the male participants have received some form of government benefit since leaving. “These forms of assistance included: Food Stamps; public housing/rental assistance; Temporary Assistance to Needy Families; Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children; Supplemental Security Income; general assistance payments; emergency assistance payments; and Cuban/Haitian or Indian assistance payments” (Courtney and Dworsky, 2006, p. 214). It is not surprising then that these young adults that were no longer in care were more likely to receive one or more of the abovementioned benefits than the youth that were still in care (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006).

In many cases, the literature outlines that social supports for these youth often ends abruptly (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). This means that youth are not able to return for support if they cannot find a place to live, or afford food to feed themselves. They must find other means to connect with these resources (Raychaba, 1989). Pecora et al. (2006b) found that former youth in care are five times more likely to receive public assistance than the general population. The National Youth in Care Network (2007) found this group in Canada often reports



receiving social assistance in order to get by because not even 30% of them graduate high school, hence they are underemployed. The connection between educational outcomes and income level is complicated for youth leaving care.

Education

A large number of youth leaving care move toward the transition of independent living with substantial educational deficits (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Osterling & Hines, 2006; Pecora et al., 2006a). The literature consistently finds that youth formerly in care are less likely to complete high school, or go on to post-secondary education (Hollander et al., 2007). In a cross-state comparison in the United States, Hollander et al. (2007) found that the youth in Illinois had generally obtained a higher level of education than those in Wisconsin and Iowa, who had left care at the age of 18, as compared to 21 in Illinois.

In the United States, only one third of the 19-year-old youth who had been in care graduated from high school. Three fifths of the general population are high school graduates or equivalent, whereas only two fifths of the youth in foster care had graduated high school (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). Poor educational outcomes are strongly correlated to high rates of unemployment for these youth, leading to the need for income support. Specific employment outcomes are discussed in the next section.

Employment

Employment for youth who have left care tends to be in low paying jobs that are held for shorter periods of time in comparison to the same age youth who had not been in care, and 47% of youth no longer in care are unemployed (Courtney and Dworsky, 2006).

What is particularly striking about the employment of these young adults is just how little they earned during the past year: Of the study participants who reported any income from employment during the past year, more than three quarters



earned less than \$5,000, and 90% earned less than \$10,000. (Courtney et al., 2006, p. 213)

Pecora et al. (2006) also found that youth who had left foster care were 15% less qualified for employment compared to the national average. Education, employment, and income or the need for income support are closely linked together but youth who have left care struggle with several other issues related specifically to the reasons for being in care.

Social supports

Most youth who are leaving care to transition into independent living have experienced maltreatment during their lives and do not have the ongoing support and guidance of their natural parents (Osterling & Hines, 2006). Social supports can come in various forms that hold importance for these youth and can include emotional, informational, guidance, social interactions and can lead to tangible and intangible skill formation (Courtney and Dworsky, 2006). Courtney and Dworsky (2006) state that youth who leave care often have no family to go to for emotional support. Yet, “despite the fact that the young adults in our study had been removed from the care of their parents, most reported being close to one or more members of their family of origin” (p, 212). The youth in this study said the closest relationships that they tended to have with their natural families were with their siblings and grandparents.

Youth who have had multiple placements have not had the opportunity to make and keep supportive friends. This can also be a result of the general inability to trust people, which stems from abuse and exploitation. Youth from a child welfare background are typically alone and isolated (Raychaba, 1989).

Positive peer support is associated with well-being, and youth with positive peers and foster parents are seen as having buffering effects on these youth (Farruggia, 2006). Therefore, it seems clear as to why these relationships would serve as protective factors in the lives of these youth. Farruggia also states: “Parents, peers, and VIPs appear to be of great importance, and often undervalued,



to the post-transition success of older foster care youth” (p. 23). Unfortunately, many of these youth are not getting the support that is said to be so important. In their study, Freundlich, et al. (2006b) found that youth age out of care with restricted or even no links to dedicated and caring adults who could help prepare youth for the transition.

Drug abuse and legal system involvement

The literature repeatedly found that youth from care had a higher rate of involvement with drugs and the legal system than the national population (Cook 1991; Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). Cook (1991) found that 25% of youth had involvement with the legal system, and 50% had used illegal drugs suggesting that drug abuse and criminal involvement are often correlated. Furthermore, alcohol and substance abuse were more widespread among males studied in the Midwest of the United States and nearly 30% of males had spent at least one night in jail compared to less than 11% of females (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006).

Jahnukainen (2007) found that Finnish youth who had left residential treatment to transition into adulthood were not productive because of drug addictions. Youth made multiple attempts to receive treatment, but had failed. This same study found that the youth with criminal involvement were all males and had been continuously involved with the legal system.

Housing

Obtaining and maintaining housing when leaving care is an obstacle for youth aging out of care. Once housing is found additional difficulties can include maintaining the home and following basic rules, and knowing their rights in regards to obtaining housing. Many youth do not know how to maintain a home, therefore landlords may feel the youth is unsuited to take care of the space they rent (Ancil et al, 2007b). Lack of transitional housing for youth leaving care has implications for other outcomes such as income and employment. Research indicates youth who have left care are at a greater risk of becoming homeless (Collins, 2004; Courtney



& Dworsky, 2006; Leathers, 2006). Ten percent of female youth and fourteen percent of male youth who have left foster care said they have experienced homelessness at one point or another after leaving care (Collins, 2004).

Mental health

High rates of depression are an ongoing theme found in the literature on youth transitioning from care (Ancil et. al, 2007a; Courtney & Dworsky 2006; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Mendes, 2005; & Pecora et al., 2006b). Courtney & Dworsky (2006) found that one third of the young adults interviewed lived with depression, dysthymia, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Females were more likely to suffer from major depression and post-traumatic stress disorder than males.

Courtney and Dworsky (2006) found that more than one fifth of youth (20.6%) who had formally been in care had been involved in psychological or emotional counselling, which is twice as high as the general population of youth (9.2%). Similarly, 7.5% of former youth in care had gone to substance abuse counselling, compared to 3% of the general population of youth.

Early parenthood

Having children at a young age is more common among youth leaving care (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Mendes, 2005). It is especially common for females who have been abused to have children, and these parents often have child welfare involvement for their own children (Mendes, 2005). Daining & DePanfilis, (2007) found that 59% of young adults sampled with child welfare involvement had at least one child. Moreover, Martin (2005), who conducted a study on youth transitioning from care, found that 50% of her female participants were parents. Courtney and Dworsky (2006) also found that almost half of their female participants had been pregnant by the age of 19. Youth who stayed in care longer have a lower rate of pregnancies. Since it is difficult to provide children with a stable home when one is struggling with homelessness and unemployment, youth leaving care are more likely



than the national population to have a child who is not living with them (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006).

After care services

After care services are those that the youth receive once they have left care and as they transition into self-sufficiency (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007). After care services are available to many youth, once they age out of care. In Ontario, Extended Care and Maintenance (ECM) agreements are offered to youth at age 18 but terminate at the age of 21. Provinces vary and may sever services as young as 18 while New Brunswick youth can be supported up to 23 years of age (Tweddle, 2005).

I wasn't prepared. They gave me that \$500 check but you know that goes but so far. I left, I had my driver's license ... But I wasn't really prepared. And I think they should have an after-care type of thing, because ... you shouldn't leave an agency without having a job, without having a place to live. And basically, they knew I really had nowhere to go. (Freundlich and Avery 2006a, p. 515)

The need for after care services as evidenced by this youth's statement is evident. Youth report that they have felt a lack of preparation for leaving care and a lack of after care services (Children's Advocate, 2007) and feel unequipped and ill prepared for leaving, even by the age of 21 (Ontario Children's Aid Societies, 2006). Freundlich & Avery (2006a) recommended that youth should continue to have contact with the agency. The results indicated that "the first 12 months post-discharge are critical ones for youth aging out of care and that the likelihood of homelessness and other negative outcomes increase for youth without adult supports" (p. 517). Youth may receive support in the form of help with attaining education, employment, budgeting, health/ hygienic, housing support, and development services (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006).

The examined literature consistently finds that the longer youth stay in care, the lower the risk becomes for the negative outcomes described above (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Raychaba, 1989). "Youth leaving care at 16 tend to be more at



risk with regard to eventually becoming homeless since they are generally rebellious, acting-out, angry, and usually suffering from acute emotional disturbance and upset” (Raychaba, 1989, p. 63). Children’s Advocate (2007) recommends the maximum age for Extended Care and Maintenance should be extended to 25 years from 21 in Manitoba. This would allow for higher educational attainment and youth would therefore be more desirable in the workforce and less dependent on income support.

Stein (2006b) says most youth stay at home until their late twenties, which makes them much older than the youth aged 16 to 18, who are leaving care. When youth in care leave, there is no “going back home,” whereas other youth may be able to transition back and forth, into and out of their home, until they are steady on their own. This can even stretch into their thirties for young adults that have a family to fall back on. Youth who have left care do not get the option of returning once they age out.

Summary of Recommendations from Research

Fewer changes in placement are a protective factor for youth who age out (Pecora et al., 2006): Tweddle, 2005). Pecora et. al., (2006a) concluded that having fewer changes in placement leads to youth building and expanding their social support networks. Consequently, this contributes to youth gaining employment, as well as having proper support if financial problems arise.

Educational routes important factors for these youth. Foster parents and various people involved with youth in care can encourage and educate youth with respect to why a high school diploma is actually more valuable than a GED. “School personnel would also benefit from more training about the challenges that youth in foster care face, and ways they can advocate for these youth” (Pecora et al., 2006a, p. 1476). Youth who complete high school have better outcomes in regards to living successful lives after leaving care (Pecora et al., 2006a). Young adults that completed a high school diploma, instead of just a GED, did proportionately better at obtaining employment and earning higher wages.



Most authors are recommending that foster care services be extended until the age of 21 (from 18), and independent living services up until the age of 25 (from 21) Pecora et al. (2006a). Extended care and maintenance agreements (Tweddle, 2005) are thought to be of benefit up to the age of 25 to allow for educational completion.

Life skills training is often recommended as essential for youth who are transitioning out of care (Nollan, Wolf, Ansell, Burns, Barr, Copeland, & Paddock, 2000; Pecora et al. 2003; & Schiff, 2006). Pecora (2006) found that youth with wide-ranging life skills were less likely to be homeless, being able to build up and keep valuable resources, as well as being able to compete for adequate employment. The Casey National Alumni Study (2003) also identified the importance of life skills for this population.

It may be that having concrete resources such as a driver's license, \$250 in cash, and dishes and utensils results in more financial stability, allowing alumni to pursue their education goals. A more plausible explanation is that these variables described youth who had received many different opportunities to develop skills for independent living, and had positive relationships with foster parents, agency staff, and other adults, as well as concrete resources. (Pecora et al., 2006a, p. 1477)

Propp et al. (2003) found that skills-based on hands-on activities need to take place in groups and foster home settings. They say that the best way to learn hands on skills is for youth to live in a semi-independent setting, which provides the opportunity to learn with support and assistance, when needed by the youth. Semi-independent settings allow for steady learning, instead of that which is much more accelerated in other in care settings (Freundlich, 2006b; Propp et al., 2003).

Connections to child and youth care practice

When working with youth aging out of care, we must reevaluate methods being practiced by being aware of the trends for this group. "Redefining the concept of independent living by moving away from self-sufficiency to interdependence calls for restructuring of caseworkers' philosophy and programming for youth aging out of



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care” (Propp et al., 2003, p. 262). The emphasis much shift to learning and tangible skills but, just as importantly, intangible skills are required.

Child and youth care work involves relationships as a fundamental part of working with youth. The research in regards to youth leaving care has ongoing references to the importance of relationships. Freundlich & Avery (2006a) emphasizes that “any approach that establishes a significant connection with an adult who can be supportive after leaving care ...” (p. 518) is essential and service should not be abruptly cut off based on the youth’s age.

Emphasis needs to be placed on assisting these youth early in the process of leaving care since there is often no involvement with workers once they have aged out of care and been discharged (English, Morreale, & Larsen, 2003). Individuals in the child and youth care field, who may be working as transition workers or youth support workers involved with youth transitioning out of care, need to be aware of the risk factors for this group in order to help them reach their full potential. The need for supportive relationships with trusting adults was often noted in the literature, and this is a wonderful opportunity to assist youth and gain their trust. We can assist this group in areas such as attaining a proper education and gaining meaningful employment. When offering our support, we show them that there are people out there that have the knowledge to be able to help them, as well as a genuine caring for their well-being and their future. The Casey Family Programs in Seattle encourage the youth they work with to build healthy relationships, not only with their foster parents and adults in their life, but also with staff (Pecora, Williams, Kessler, Hiripi, O’Brien, Emerson, Herrick, & Torres, 2006b).

Youth have said they felt unprepared when they were leaving foster care.

They [the staff] never discussed [how to prepare for the transition from care], while I was in there. They didn’t give me time to think it out. They told me the day before it was time for me to be discharged. Once I turned 18, that’s when they all threw the pressure at me. Like, ‘well, you’re going to have to do this and you got to do that and you got to’ ... OK, I understand that, but the whole time I was up here, you didn’t train me for any of this. So you expect me to just go out there and



just get everything in one shot. But it's not like that. It takes time. (Freundlich & Avery, 2006a, p. 515)

Staff working with this population need to better prepare youth for the transition out of care, and it needs to begin to happen much sooner because youth have expressed concern that they are not prepared in advance for the transition. To best prepare these youth, trust needs to be established between the youth and the people working towards this goal with them (Freundlich et al., 2006b).

Conclusion

The literature indicates that youth leaving care are facing tough obstacles in comparison to youth of the same age who have not come from a child welfare background, and only a small number of youth leaving care demonstrate that they are on their way to leading successful lives (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). Furthermore, all of the literature, discusses extending the age limit for state care well beyond the current age of 18 or 21.

This population is frequently overlooked and requires assistance in order to function as self-serving and successful adults in our society. These youth deserve a chance like any other youth and, with the help of committed child and youth care professionals aware of what life may hold for them as adults, we can make a successful transition to adulthood a reality for them.

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Learning to Cope with Stresses and Strains

Gisela Konopka

Editor's note

This article was originally featured in issue 39 of CYC-Online in April of 2002 as a republication from an earlier issue of Child and Youth Care in 1977. We are glad to highlight it as it provides a foundation to many of the other articles included in this month's issue. We especially appreciate the creative expression of the voice of youth. You can read the original article, which was the first of two, at this link: <http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0402-konopka.html>

Concept of adolescence

It seems to me best to let an adolescent talk first before I say anything about that age group. A girl wrote:

*I am a bottle sealed with feeling
too deep for anything else.*

I am a bottle floating in an eternal ocean of people trying to help.

I am a bottle keeping my fragile contents inside. Always afraid of breaking and exposing me.

I am a bottle frail and afraid of the rock. And afraid of the storm. For if the storm or rocks burst or cracked me, I would sink and become part of the ocean.

I am a person in the people of the world.



This 16-year-old expresses clearly that an adolescent is part of humanity, is a person. This should be self-evident; yet in recent years adolescents have been treated often as if they are a species apart, to be feared or occasionally to be flattered.

The period of adolescence is as significant a period in life for the development of the total personality as are the first years in childhood. It is a time of rebirth.

To me and this differs from many textbook descriptions of adolescence – this period does not represent only a "pre", a preparation for adulthood, or worse, a "no-man's land" between childhood and adulthood. Adolescents are not "pre-adults", "pre-parents", or "pre-workers", but human beings participating in their particular way in the activities of the world around them. Adolescence is not a passage to somewhere but an important stage in itself, though all stages of human development connect with each other. There is an "adolescenthood". The key experiences of adolescence (which always include stresses and strains) are certain firsts which need to be worked through.

It must be understood that no generalization about human beings ever totally applies to one person and that in working with people, we will have to each time look afresh at the human being with whom we interact. A 15-year-old said this best:

*I used to be
a grape in a bunch
and all the other
grapes were the same.
But now I'm an apple, crisp
and fresh, and every
one is different.
My, how life has changed!*



Some of the "firsts" I refer to are:

1. Experiencing physical sexual maturity. A phenomenon particular to adolescence that never occurs again in the life of the individual is the process of developing sexual maturation, different from the state of accomplished sexual maturation. Biologically this is a totally new experience. Its significance is due both to its pervasiveness and to the societal expectations surrounding it. It creates in adolescents a great wonderment about themselves and a feeling of having something in common with all human beings. It influences all their relationships with each other, male or female. Entering this part of maturity also stimulates them to a new assessment of the world.
2. Experiencing withdrawal of — and from — adult benevolent protection. Along with the biological maturity attained in adolescence come varying degrees of withdrawal of, and from, the protection generally given to dependent children by parents or substitutes. We know that some young people were never protected, even as children; but, whatever the degree of previous protection, the adolescent is moving out from the family toward interdependence (not independence, but interdependence) in three areas: (a) with his peers, his own generation; (b) with his elders, but on an interacting or questioning level instead of a dependent level; and (c) with younger children, not on a play level but on a beginning-to-care-for-and-nurture level. This process of moving away from dependency creates tensions and emotional conflicts.
3. Consciousness of self in interaction. The development of self and the searching for self starts in childhood. but the intellectual and the emotional consciousness of self in interaction with others is a particular characteristic of adolescence. It is a time when personal meaning is given to new social experiences. What may have been clear and explicable may suddenly



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become inexplicable. This makes for inner excitement, frightening and yet enjoyable.

4. Re-evaluation of values. Though the formation of values is a lifelong developmental process, it peaks in adolescence. It is related to both thinking and feeling. In our culture, where young people are likely to be exposed to a variety of contradictory values, (and I welcome this) questioning begins even in childhood. But adolescents become more philosophers concerned with "shoulds" and "oughts" and they may be subtle or outspoken about it. Value confrontations are inevitable in this age period. The young, because of their intensity, tend to be uncompromising. They may opt clearly for a thoroughly egalitarian value system, or they may give up and become cynics. They often are "true believers", rigid, and therefore feel deeply hurt when others do not accept their value system.
5. Wanting to be an active participant in society. Adolescents encounter their world with a new intellectual and emotional consciousness. They meet it less as observers who are satisfied with this role, than as participants who actually have a place to fill. I see this wish to participate as a most significant "first" in adolescence. In the old, mostly European, textbooks it appears as the adolescent quality of rebellion, and for years we have considered rebellion an inevitable attribute of adolescence. I think that this is true in authoritarian societies — and we are partially still an authoritarian society — but basically it is not rebellion that characterizes adolescence, but this extraordinary new awakening to the fact that one must develop one's values, and not only by imitation. This is a terribly hard task and brings with it enormous stress. Another key characteristic of adolescents is their enormous life force. It is an age of extraordinary physical capacity. This is sometimes at variance with the emotional development, and that again makes for great strain. It is an age where the mood swings with utmost intensity from omnipotence to despair. Adolescents can go without sleep for a long time; they run, jump, dance. In one of the Youth Polls done by



the Centre for Youth Development and Research in which the subject of health was at issue, it became clear that adolescents define health as "activity and energy". One said, "I think I am healthy when I am able to walk and run and run around all day and not be tired."

Content areas of life significant to adolescence

The major institutions in which adolescents move have begun to be the same all over the world. Cultures change rapidly. For example, the teenage Bedouin, until recently, had to develop predominantly within the extended family and handle stresses within this system. His work environment was static in terms of its tasks, namely herding goats, but it was changing geographically because of the tribe's nomad existence. The girl had no decisions to make, only to obey. Yet, today, most of the Bedouin teenagers have to deal with a smaller family unit, with school, with a variety of work tasks, and with less nomadic movement. These changes impinge on the girls, too.

Now, discussing institutions, the most significant ones in adolescent life today are: the family, the school, the place of work, and the peer group.

I. The family. It is a myth that North American young people do not care for the family. In every survey the Centre for Youth Development and Research has made, the yearning for close family ties emerges clearly. Even a runaway wrote:

*The first night was cold damn cold.
And walking around the avenues,
we would mock the whores.
The big man and his badge
would give us a cold eye.
And without hesitation,
we would flip him a bird.
I wished for my mother,*



*and I wished for sympathy –
For a warm bed, and not the cold
shipyard or the park swings.
I feel really old for 15,
there just isn't any place to go.
Mama I miss you – and I just spent my last dollar
for cigarettes.*

The major frustration for an adolescent within the family is to suffer the role of an inferior at an age when the wish to be taken seriously, and as an equal, is very intense. Frustrating experiences range from being treated "like a kid" to serious abuse. And additional frustration can result from the youth's keen awareness of problems between parents.

Younger children suffer deeply from strife between parents, but adolescents often feel that they have to do something about it, that they have to take on the responsibility in the situation. I found again and again a deep resentment of divorce, and at the same time, a feeling that the adolescent should have done something to prevent it. Also, adolescents, unlike younger children, begin to look to the future. Many expressed a wish for starting a family, but also feared it.

2. The school. Some of the same dynamics as in the family apply to the relationship of the adolescent to school. Again, the strong sense of self comes in conflict with possible violation of the vulnerable self-integrity. The youth wants to be seen as an individual as expressed by the wishes: "There should be a one to ten ratio of teachers to students." They should treat young people 'like adults, not like two-year-olds, unless students just don't co-operate. Discuss all material that will be tested. Make every effort to answer all questions. Do best to help each student by keeping classes smaller. Not like we are their slaves or workers and they are the boss."



There are other stresses in school. It is the place where the students expect to learn. Adolescents in their own way begin to evaluate whether they learn what they need, and whether they measure up. They feel strongly injustice and discrimination:

The teachers are sort of scared of Blacks here. I'm not the kind of person that shows how much I hate them. I just sit back and do mostly what I'm supposed to do. But teachers are still scared. If I ask a question, some of the teachers just ignore me. And I sit back and I watch this and I feel it.

Sometimes, I don't understand what they are saying. The teachers, they talk but when you go up to the desk and ask what they mean, they don't say nothing.

They just say, 'Go on and do it!' They don't explain. They just say, 'Go back to your desk and do it.'

3. The place of work. Many adolescents do work while in school, though others see it as part of the future. We found in our observations a generally quite strong work ethic. Two students expressed themselves: "... looking forward to starting a job because it gives one a sense of responsibility," and "want to work ... because we've trained for it for so long and we're anxious to start." Contrary to popular assumption, adolescents felt a responsibility for the work they were doing. They frequently regretted not having an opportunity to work on something that would prepare them for a future career. Young people can rarely find work related to special interests. A 16-year-old volunteered to work in the Rape Centre of the Attorney General's Office and saw this as an opportunity not only for feeling significant at that particular time in her life, but also to find out what her specific interests would be. But a recent study showed that usually adolescents felt



frustrated because their jobs had no connection with their interests and were not realistic experiences.

They make us work like people in yester-years, like out of the 18th century. With machinery, the government could accomplish something with more speed, efficiency and effectiveness. Instead, they give you old-time machines to do the work.

4. The peer group. For adolescents it is a most important one. In our culture this world exists within organized institutions and in informal encounters. School is seen by practically all adolescents as the major formal institution where they can find friends. Youth organizations may also provide friends along with very positive experiences.

*On midsummer's eve the moon was high in the sky.
We danced all night in the moon's smiling, gleaming face,
We ran about the park with youngness and freedom,
We sang songs of old and new.*

*We played on midsummer's eve as though it were
never to leave us.
The morning soon followed, so we left.
But we will be back on midsummer's.*

But for others, school may mean the unpleasant strain or, for a variety of reasons, painful rejection by one's peers. The world of peers is really the lifeblood of adolescence. Friendships with both sexes, intensified by growing sexual maturity, are exceedingly important and complex. They demand decision-making about oneself, about others, about the present and the future. Decision-making is written large all through adolescence, and no decisions are more important than those about peer relationships.



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SAVE THE DATE



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Postcard from Leon Fulcher

From Te Kura o Waikaremoana at Tuai

Kia Ora and Happy
Summertime to
Northern

Hemisphere readers! Our local *Kura* or primary school last week hosted a special sporting event with the five other rural primary schools in our District. From 8:30 am, there was plenty of action around the school.

The story of *Te Kura o Waikaremoana* dates from the original New Zealand Native Kokako School, where Maori were first educated here. Following the New Zealand wars, the Native Schools Act 1867 established a national system of village primary schools under the control of the Native Department. Māori were required to donate the land for the



*Te Kura o Waikaremoana built on the grounds of
Kokako School*



*Eight mixed school and mixed gender groups engaged in
8 testing events*



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schools and contribute to the costs of a building and teacher's salary. The 1880 Native School Code standardised conditions for the establishment of a school, the curriculum, hours of instruction, governance and other matters. Schooling became compulsory for Māori in 1894.



A netball in the bucket test and water carrying test

From the outset, the priority of the Native Schools was the teaching of English. The plan was to phase out the Native Schools once English had taken hold in a community. Initially, the Māori language was permitted to facilitate English instruction, but as time went on, official attitudes hardened against any use of Māori language at schools and in later years, many Māori children were punished for speaking their first language at school or school grounds.

Kokako School was established in 1897 and a second primary school was established in *Tuai* to support a population of 13,000 Lake Waikaremoana Power Scheme employees and families for white or *Pakeha* children. The 2 *Tuai* schools were merged in 2004 and then moved in 2009 to the old site of *Kokako* Native School. Today, *Tuai* is a



An egg and spoon race – with tennis balls instead of eggs!



community of 300 people, most of whom are Maori. Twenty-nine Maori children now attend the local *Kura*.

The gathering of rural primary schools in our region were welcomed to *Te Kura o Waikaremoana*. This was a first for our *Kura* in the last five years. As designated BBQ Chef for the occasion, I engaged in people-watching while offering up 80 servings of sausages or meat patties on bread with tomato sauce and fried onion options for hungry, happy children.

Egg and spoon races require different skills when replacing the egg with a tennis ball! Organizers couldn't face the messy prospect of broken eggs so used tennis balls instead. Once children worked out it helped to hold the spoon near to the tennis ball, they succeeded.

Field hockey skills tested weaving a ball around cones with a hockey stick. A football kicking event tested how many could get the soccer ball through a hoop. Very successful activities.



Egg and spoon test involved crossing bench and crawling under a table



A modified hockey test and kicking a soccer ball through the hoop test



A noticeable feature of the morning was the huge number of school-aged children from local rural schools along with their younger siblings who came along with parents. There was a real sense of participation and achievement! It is very important that our community supports such initiatives because when reaching age 12, Kura children will start riding school buses to Wairoa College, our local secondary school. Research carried out by Amanda Riley (2016) identified 8 rural bus routes with some students having 2-hour bus rides each way! Regional events such as these build future relationships that ease transitioning into College.

The New Zealand Weta with spiny hind legs are amongst the largest insects in the world!



Children everywhere - including younger siblings - in a successful gathering



A friendly but scary-looking 4-inch New Zealand Weta seeking Winter warmth!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leon". The signature is stylized and includes a small smiley face above the letter 'o'.



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

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

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In general:

- Submissions should be no longer than 2500 words
- The style of a paper is up to the author
- We prefer APA formatting for referencing
- We are willing to work with first-time authors to help them get published
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