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A Global Community for Care Leavers

Kiran Modi

The youth harbour the capability to build a strong nation and steer it towards triumph. But what would ensure this triumph is the duty of the State to ensure equal distribution of opportunities, aid and platform to articulate and push the aspirations of all its young adults. Unfortunately, for many young persons, this is not a reality.

Care Leavers are one of the most vulnerable youth populations. Even with legal provisions aligned and voices recognized at various platforms, these young people are haunted by their past, inconsistent accessibility of resources and lack of guidance during their transition to independence, often leading to traumatic hurdles. Attending to the Care Leavers without fitting interventions and support systems hamper the future of these young adults and this facet is pertinent across continents[1]. Diverse regions, forums and networks have been embarking on several initiatives and conversations at national and transnational tiers to ensure the protection and advocacy of rights of youth in Alternative Care.

[1] Modi, K., Kalra, G., Prasad, L. 2021. Alternative Care in the times of COVID in India: Udayan Care's Response. *The Therapeutic Care Journal*.

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Connecting the dots with the various forums and commencing a dialogue in 2020, a series of webinars and events[2] were held with Care Leavers internationally between June and September 2020 with the backing of like-minded partners. At the same time, most care systems were buckling under the strain of the global pandemic, there was encountered rapid closure of institutions, blind restorations of children and youth to their erstwhile families without any support and follow-ups, termination of social services and failure to support Care Leavers, just when they needed it the most. Addressing these problems, the virtual gatherings gave conception to a binding document reflecting the demands of Care Leavers in the layout of a Declaration titled "Responding to the transnational needs of Care Leavers amidst COVID-19[3]". Endorsed by 42 organizations and networks, the declaration captured the voids of the struggles and lack of aid for Care Leavers during the COVID-19 leading to the 1st International Care Leavers Convention[4] from *November 23rd - 25th, 2020*. Before the main event, four pre-events were organised, focussing on different aspects of care leaving than that of the main event. The virtual assemblage witnessed the partnering of Care Leavers Networks, namely Care Leavers Association and Network, India, Generation Never Give Up, Sri Lanka, Latin American of Care Leavers and Zimbabwe Care Leavers Network and four Civil Society Organizations, namely Kinderperspectief (Netherlands), SOS Children's Villages, Udayan Care (India), University of Hildesheim (Germany). With the participation of close to 2300 people from over 83 countries from 6 continents, this Convention provided a unique outlet and experience to Care Leavers globally to come jointly and voice

2.http://www.careleaverscommunity.org/convention.html#:~:text=Watch%20Convention%20Now!-,Pre%20Events,-How%20do%20I

3 http://www.careleaverscommunity.org/declaration.html

4 http://www.careleaverscommunity.org/convention.html

their reflections to enable a common safe platform to learn, share and exchange their experiences, knowledge and challenges.

Addressing the articulated challenges by global Care Leavers community, the Convention led to the documentation of a series of guiding principles for policymakers and practitioners, accentuating the points on better preparation of Care Leavers before leaving care, participation and inclusion to partake in every policy ideation and research, support from Government and Civil Society, continuity of relationship with caregivers, creating a "safety net" for Care Leavers, consensus on "25 should be the new 18" as the age of care leaving, alert about housing benefits of Care Leavers, and other aids, efficacious collaboration and partnership, developing their own social networks, public sensitisation, and maintenance of adequate data systems. Key themes emerging from the Convention were presented, before a panel of policymakers from 11 countries and sought their commitments, as a follow up and highlighted the importance of sharing, connecting, and extending Peer-support with and amongst Care Leavers globally.

The most visible takeaway of the Convention was a growing sense of community among global Care Leavers, care workers, researchers and policymakers. It paved the route for the pioneering of the Global Care Leavers Community, an online portal, with an agenda to bridge the crevices with knowledge to exchange opinions beyond borders. The Global Care Leavers community activated a virtual stage for the Care Leavers from across the globe, by launching the online Care leavers Cafe sessions every month, to connect and engage regularly, and share their stories, news and events and build a sense of belongingness.

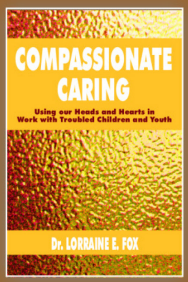
Active forums like DGD and numerous networks together are forming a roadway to enable the Care Leavers to be vocal and firm about their

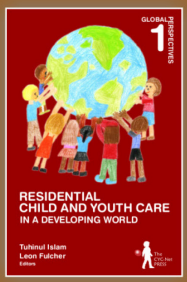
aspirations and expectations, implying the importance of love, trust and a safe space to nurture the feelings and thoughts of the community. The deliberations of the *1st International Care Leavers Convention 2020* and thereafter pitched an emotion loud and clear "Nothing about us without us."

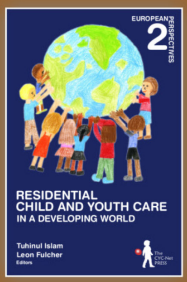
Driving this zeal and vision, these young minds, regardless of past experiences, deserve a chance at life and, through these global networks, we aspire to joining hand with the Care Leavers to shine brighter on their own terms.

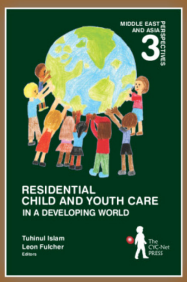
DR KIRAN MODI *has a doctorate in American Literature from the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, and as co-author of a series of books on Life Skills and Health for children. Dr Modi is a person of varied interests, including the media and children's theatre as well as being a founding member of several Trusts and Foundations working for the disadvantaged in India. Besides direct work with Child and Youth Care, in the Udayan Ghar Programme and Udayan Care,, Dr Modi is also the Founding Editor of the bi-annual journal, 'Institutionalised Children: Explorations and Beyond', focused on South Asia. Through direct work, running group homes for children and aftercare programmes for youth, writing papers and organising training programmes, seminars and conferences, she has been advocating for better standards of care in Child and Youth Care practices across India and South Asia region. Dr Modi is also a member of the CYC-Net board of governors.*

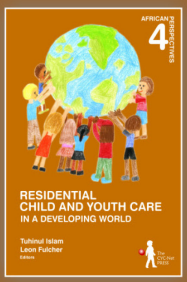
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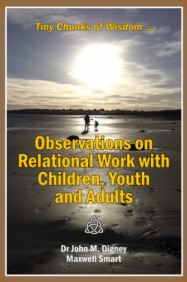


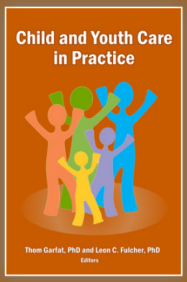


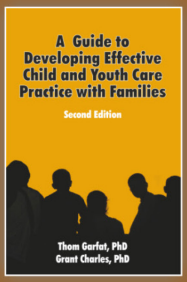


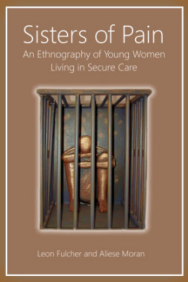


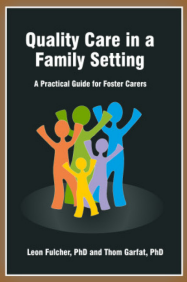


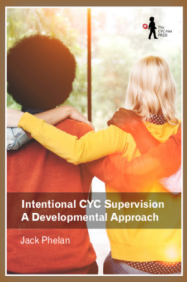


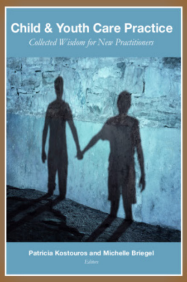


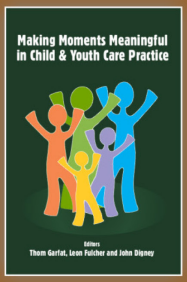


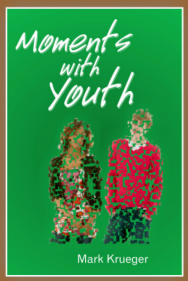


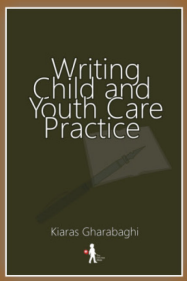


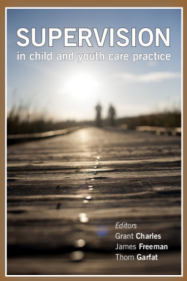


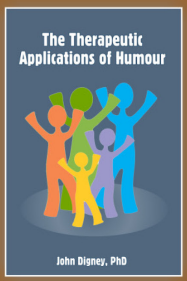


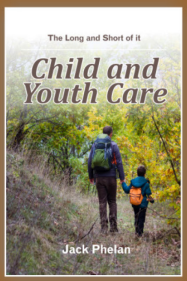












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Building a Rewarding Child and Youth Care Career as a New Practitioner

Kiaras Gharabaghi

Every now and again, I feel the need to dispel the myth that child and youth care practice offers limited opportunities in terms of building a rewarding and exciting career. Nothing could be further from the truth. But as in all other fields, building such a career requires some initiative and some bold moves. And it is of course fair to say that what constitutes a rewarding and exciting career differs from person to person. I don't want to suggest that such a career necessarily must include the kinds of pathways I am about to describe. Many practitioners have found it rewarding and exciting to be present with young people in a particular setting (for example, school, residential care, or a community setting) for decades. There is nothing wrong with that; in fact, in many such settings, we rely very heavily on the wisdom accumulated by those who have been there for a very long time.

Nevertheless, I suspect many young people just starting out in their career path worry about how long they will remain motivated and excited, showing up for their shifts day in and day out. We all know that the work we want to do with young people is not always possible given systemic inequities and the restrictions imposed by institutional employers, and the prospect of being frustrated by such limitations for years and years is not

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particularly exciting. So, what can we do to ensure a more varied experience, with more unusual, unpredictable, but possibly incredibly exciting prospects?

In the same way that child and youth care practice really emphasizes relational ways of being as the core of the practice itself, child and youth care career building also relies very heavily on relational ways of being. Accumulating relationships and connections beyond one's daily employment preoccupations is one important element of building a great career. This means that new practitioners may want to engage in two activities simultaneously: First, maintain and nurture the relationships and connections already made during the pre-service years, such as during college or university while enrolled in a child and youth care program. The people you are sitting in class with, you are made to complete group assignments with, and who, like you, are wondering about what might come next, are very likely people you will encounter again in the years to come. Some of them will become leaders in the field, managers in agencies, policymakers that impact our field. Knowing them will be helpful and investing time in nurturing your connections with them will turn out to be one of your better investments.



The same can be said of the people teaching you; college and university instructors are usually experienced people who themselves have accumulated many relationships and connections in the field. It is a real shame to attend a post-secondary CYC education program for two to four years without connecting meaningfully with your instructors. It turns out that when instructors get to know you well enough to remember you for years to come, they are an extraordinarily useful resource that you can call upon time and again. Most people I know in post-secondary education are delighted to hear from former students. Instructors also often look for current and former students to participate in a range of projects that may open new avenues for career development, and they are much more likely to call upon students who they know than those that have remained anonymous throughout their studies.

Second, we can expand our connections and relationships on an ongoing basis. Beyond the relationship resources you can find in your post-secondary education program, there are endless other organizations and groups of people you can easily access. In most jurisdictions, there are professional associations or unions you can become associated with. This is very worthwhile, as the people you encounter in those settings are generally people who are very good at reaching out, connecting with others, and responding to your efforts to nurture new relationships. Professional associations and unions often organize events that bring diverse child and youth care practitioners together, leading to further relationship opportunities and connections that you may not previously had access to. Beyond the local context of these kinds of organizations, there are many international organizations as well. For example, FICE International (which has national chapters in many countries, including a recently formed Canadian chapter) brings together a wide range of people

at all stages of career who share an interest in out of home forms of care around the world. CYC-Net itself is an international organization that provides easy access to new practitioners for relationship building and new connections. It is a forum for exchanging ideas and observations about practice and covers real world practice in many different countries around the world. A simple thing to do once in a while is to read the articles posted either in *CYC-Online* or in the *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* journal published by the CYC-Net Press and to write to the authors of such articles with comments or impressions of what they wrote. Immediately you have a new connection, and if you correspond with these authors from time to time, you transform your connection into a relationship.

The point really is that building a career in our field is about reaching out, taking a chance, and introducing yourself to others. Sometimes we don't have all that much to say, other than that we are young, new in the field, and interested to be connected to others. That's good enough. In many cases, this leads to long term connections that will come in handy as you develop your career. Of course, nowhere is this potential greater than at physical gatherings of CYC people, such as academic or practice conferences. These exist in abundance everywhere, and although there is often a cost associated with attending, it is a worthwhile cost to bear if you are prepared to make use of your attendance by engaging with people.

One thing to keep in mind is that we are often tempted to engage only with those people with whom we identify some common ground. Although we tell ourselves that common ground is substantive in nature, by which I mean it is an area of practice or something about the field we agree on or have something in common, this temptation to engage those we see as similar to ourselves or those we can immediately relate to is often also based on our fears of inter-racial, inter-cultural, cross-gender or

cross-sub-cultural engagement. Yet I would argue that career opportunities are most likely to be realized when we transcend these feelings and engage across communities of difference. New things are rarely found in sameness; it is precisely when we open our minds and our hearts to individuals and groups of people whose perspectives, social positions, and narratives are quite different from our own that we generate new possibilities. Do keep in mind that many of the traditional CYC gatherings are not great at offering access to communities of difference. It is often necessary to specifically seek out opportunities for gatherings with those who are definitely embedded in the field of child and youth care practice (or youth work more generally), but who have not felt particularly welcome at the field's traditional gatherings.

My advice to new practitioners, therefore, is to seek out collaborations – these might be collaborations on writing something, or on a project, or on creating a new forum for discussion, or on developing a new dialogue about tension in our field. Collaborations help us get connected with people we might have previously simply not seen or recognized as being part of a common cause; people who might speak to an area of practice or an approach to understanding practice that renders visible something that had been invisible to us.

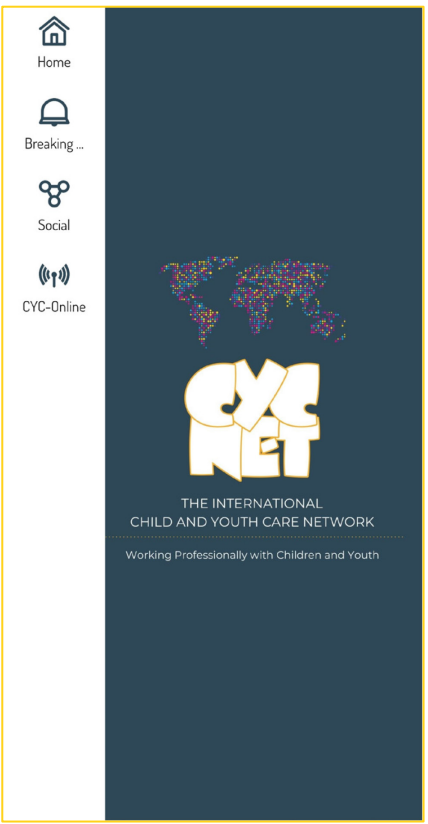


The world of child and youth care practice is profoundly global. It unfolds everywhere, even if it does so under different labels and names. It has many different starting points and leads down many different roads. And it incorporates many different activities and media, from the arts to performance and theatre, to sports, futurism, spiritual aspects, urban and rural contexts, health issues such as HIV/AIDS and now also Coronavirus, music and much more. Often forgotten or not considered are entrepreneurial aspects of our field that might include interfaces with fields such as business, social innovation and technology. Child and youth care is relevant in the context of child and youth rights, anti-racism, gender, neurodiversity, ability and disability, and so much more. And it falls within the purview of small, very local grassroots organizations and movements as well as massive international organizations ranging from the United Nations to the Red Cross, Save the Children, World Vision and Oxfam. Almost all institutional contexts of child and youth care, from residential services to schools to hospitals and community centres, exist everywhere in the world in some form.

In short, you are entering a field of massive scope; career building within this field doesn't have to engage everything the field has to offer, but it would be prudent to explore, through relationships and connections, the possibilities embedded in a deeply global and connected field of practice and thought that has virtually endless manifestations.

DR KIARAS GHARABAGHI *is Dean of the Faculty of Community Services at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada and a regular contributor to* CYC-Online. *He can be reached at k.gharabaghi@ryerson.ca*

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Creating Change

Jack Phelan

The most straightforward description of the goal of effective CYC practice would include creating change, both supporting people to change the way they think about themselves and changing the strategies and behaviors they employ to be successful in their lives.

CYC theories, program structures and treatment planning all focus on encouraging people to be different and measuring how much change occurs during and after the process of treatment. CYC educational goals and supervision approaches aim to teach practitioners the techniques and practical methods which lead to shifts in how young people and families live. We have also begun to emphasize sensitivity to power imbalances, gender and cultural diversity and ethical dilemmas. All of these training efforts focus on changing the person being helped and then evaluating how much change has happened.



CYC supervision emphasizes program delivery dynamics and how the behavior of the young people or families can be influenced using the tools and environmental incentives available in the program design. Supervision agendas are based on what the practitioners need to do and what they need know to act correctly. The goal of creating change is focussed specifically on how to change the person being helped.

I would like to consider a different target for change, where the CYC practitioner is the focus of supervisory efforts to create change. My belief is that when practitioners think differently about what they are doing, the results can be greatly enhanced. To put it simply, supervisors can focus on how practitioners think, not what they think. Program strategies and methods can look quite similar when you only look at the behavior of practitioners who think differently about what is happening, but the results of their efforts are not the same. The intention behind each intervention strategy has an enormous influence on the person being supported. We have often neglected examining the helper's intentions, his mental image of why he is creating results or reactions and have jumped into measuring the young person or family's response. When the intervention is not successful, we look to the young person or family and ignore the intentionality of the helper.

I would like to suggest that as a practitioner matures and becomes more professionally adept, he/she has also mentally shifted and developed more complex intentions as they intervene in the lives of people. The growth in more complex intentionality corresponds to the developmental dynamics described in the three levels of professional change known as the competent care giver (Level 1), the treatment planner and change agent (Level 2), and the creative, free-thinking professional (Level 3).

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The agenda of supervisory efforts to support this growth in complex thinking about intentions can be focussed on how the practitioner constructs his/her picture of Self. Simply put, the newer practitioner builds self image based on safety dynamics, particularly concerned with personal safety. The more experienced (2-4 year) practitioner sees self in a teacher, influencer role, with a need to be personally attractive and the creative professional permeates every interaction with a self that is completely present, yet free of self-interest. CYC supervision can support the self journey of practitioners in a process that will build an awareness of intentionality that will enhance the overall effectiveness of our change efforts.

I will describe the specifics of each level of self construction and its effects on intentionality and program results in future columns.

JACK PHELAN *is a regular contributor to* CYC-Online*. He is the author of* Intentional CYC Supervision: A Developmental Approach *and* Child and Youth Care: The Long and Short of It, *both available through the CYC-Net Press. Jack teaches Child and Youth Care at Grant MacEwan College in Alberta, Canada. Learn more at https://cyc-net.org/People/people-phelan.html*

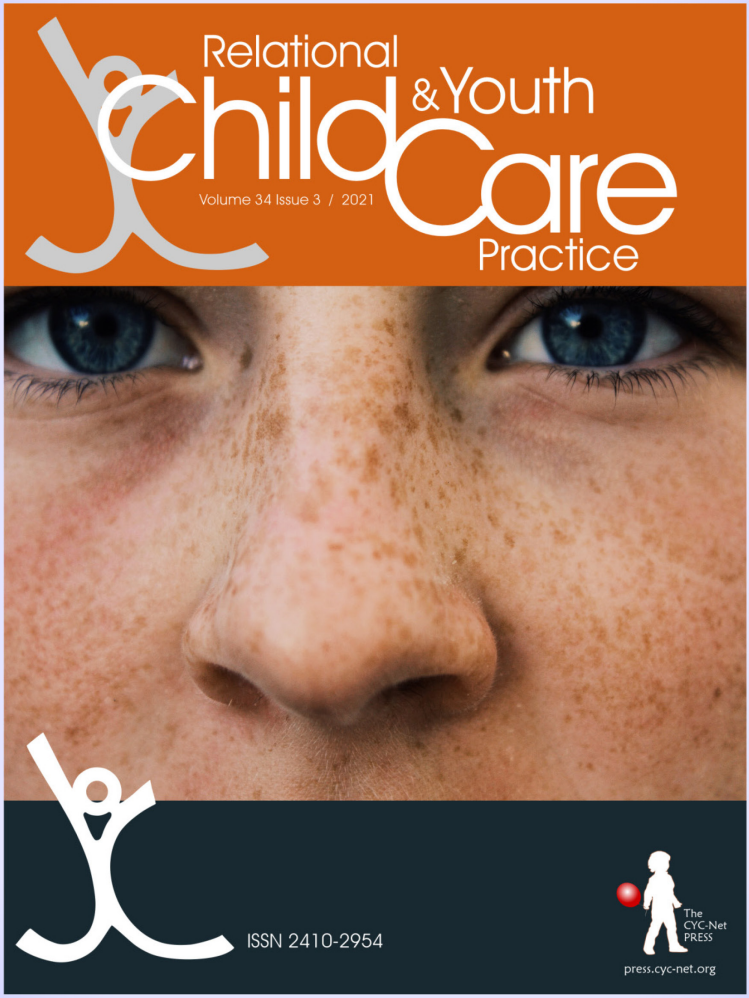


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“The least important person in the room”: Father involvement as a critical factor in gender equality

Jessica Pratezina

Abstract

In the decades since Hochschild and Machung (2012) first conceived of “the second shift”, the unequal distribution of care work among mother-father co-parents has been a topic of great concern to scholars, advocates, and mothers themselves. Despite slow progress towards greater equality, mothers still take on most of the housework, childcare, kin-keeping, household management, and mental/emotional labour. This imbalance has far-reaching consequences that impact women’s wellness, financial stability, career aspirations and achievements, and relationship satisfaction. Yet, increased father involvement in the home is not promoted as a factor in gender equality and few policies, programs, or practitioners advocate for the redistribution of care-work as a means to mitigate the burden placed on mothers. Even in the discourse and practice of child and youth care professionals, this unequal distribution of care is most often construed as an individual relationship issue instead of a complex social problem linked to gendered norms and expectations around being a “good mother” or “good father”, as well as to a host of other societal conditions such as workplace policies that effectively sustain the status quo. Mothers are often positioned as the presumptive, “natural”, default parents, while failure to highlight the important roles that fathers can and often want to play reinforces gender inequality. Child and youth care practitioners can be

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strong advocates for women's equality by interrogating their own practice and considering the ways that mother-centrism reifies rather than reduces gender inequality in parenting relationships and beyond.

Keywords
Father involvement, gender equality, family formation, child and youth care practice

As I write this, I am two weeks out from the birth of my first child. I entered my doctoral program with the intention of studying father involvement as a factor in gender equality. Three days after receiving my acceptance letter I learned I was pregnant, meaning my husband and I would be taking participant observation to the next level. Because the pregnancy took place during the COVID-19 lockdown, it was a rather isolating experience. There was no opportunity for my husband to accompany me to any doctor's appointments or ultrasounds. Once during a brief reprieve in the Toronto lockdown we were able to walk into a baby shop together. This was as close as we got to interacting with other expectant couples or speaking together with "professionals" (i.e. the shopkeeper who sold us the stroller). At the same time, work-from-home policies meant that the two of us were together in our tiny apartment for nearly every hour of the day. When I was at my sickest and most miserable, the only one who could care for me was my husband who was privy to every bout of nausea, every night of interminable insomnia, and every tear of frustrated suffering. Despite his exclusion from the medical appointments, I do not know how he could have been a more involved and invested father.

After our baby was born a stream of nurses and doctors attended to us in the hospital, completing all the requisite checks and procedures. One particularly friendly and experienced nurse sat chatting with me as she pricked my tiny new baby's heels for routine newborn screening while my husband closed his eyes across the room for a few moments of much-earned sleep (if you can call it that).

"And when you get home," the nurse continued, "Make sure you don't wear yourself out looking after your other son."

"Oh, I don't have any other children," I said.

"No, I mean …" she motioned her head to my husband.

"Ah," I replied. I understood what she was implying.

Indeed, she was not wrong to make this assumption. It does not take an academic to know that, in much of the Euro-Western world, women in mother-father partnerships end up taking on most of the care-work, particularly when a new baby enters the family. In Canada, this amounts to about 1.5 times more unpaid housework and childcare/eldercare hours than men (Gender and Economy, 2021). Not only are men exempt from the expectation that they will contribute to the routine care work in the family, but they are also regularly positioned in popular as well as professional discourse as child-like and, essentially, incompetent when it comes to these tasks, with some going so far as to suggest that women are essentially (or biologically) more suited to household work. What the friendly nurse was alerting me to was simply the reality that occurs for most new mother-father couples; instead of finding a co-parent in the baby's father, the mother finds she is now expected, both socially and relationally, to be responsible for the care and feeding of both.

Not long after the birth, my husband and I took the baby to the pediatrician. The doctor introduced himself by acknowledging the baby and then me before proceeding with the appointment.

"And the baby's father, Daniel," I interjected.

"Well, yes," said the doctor, then jokingly added, to my husband, "You're the least important person in the room!"

These are two small examples of how fathers are positioned in professional discourse and practice as both incompetent as well as unnecessary parents. Even when they show up, they are remarkably invisible to the professionals they interact with. This mother-centrism, the spoken and unspoken understanding that the mother is the natural, default, parent, is reinforced across medical and social service practices as well as popular media and advertising. Consequently, mothers are expected to take ultimate responsibility for their children, overburdening women in mother-father partnerships, excluding fathers from the social supports they need to give them confidence and competence as parents, while, at the same time, exempting them from the routine responsibilities of parenthood.

Interventions aimed at increasing gender equality are typically targeted towards supporting and encouraging mothers to continue in their unpaid care work obligations rather than expecting fathers to increase involvement and shoulder an equal share of these tasks. Under the pretext of supporting women, the exclusion of fathers from social supports and programs aimed at parents and families reifies gender norms and reinscribes women as the primary parents. I argue that policies that promote women in parental roles while exempting fathers allow women to continue to provide unpaid care-work at the expense of their own personal

aspirations, wellness, preferences, and financial stability. Consider the example of my friend, Sue. When her baby was having difficulty maintaining his weight, a dietician needed to become involved. Sue asked that the dietician contact her partner, the baby's father, who was the one responsible for food and cooking in their house. Despite this request the professional continued to make appointments only with Sue and made no attempt to involve the baby's father.

Across social service fields, gender equality in the home is seen as a relationship issue rather than a social issue, best tackled in the therapist's office rather than through appropriate public and social policies. Underlying this construction is often the assumption that mothers are naturally or essentially better suited to care-work and, therefore, the default parents. Unfortunately, we as child and youth care professionals contribute to this continued inequality in our professional practice by reinforcing social norms that place responsibility on mothers while failing to call on fathers as equal co-parents. Changing these practices and perceptions requires a new kind of advocacy work that holds up fathers as capable and responsible and promotes inclusion by refusing to exempt fathers from their parental roles.

The second shift continues

Struggles with gender equality in co-parenting relationships are unique to mother-father couples. Multiple theories from different perspectives have been put forward to explain why women in heterosexual relationships continue to experience problems with gender equality despite a great deal of interest and concern in the topic. The wage gap between opposite-gender couples becomes even more severe when children are introduced

(American Association of University Women, 2018). Parenting has an unequal impact on women in mother-father couples that is not seen with their lesbian counterparts who, without long-established gender norms to guide them, are able to divide up household and childcare tasks in a more equitable way (Rosenbaum, 2019). In what has been dubbed the "motherhood penalty," employers are less likely to hire mothers, tend to view mothers as less competent workers, and pay mothers 71% as much as fathers in the same role (American Association of University Women, 2018). At the same time, many fathers in heterosexual relationships experience a "fatherhood bonus," receiving higher wages than men without children and being perceived as more reliable and responsible workers (Fuller & Cook, 2018). At least in part, this is because women are expected to continue to be the primary caretakers and household managers in addition to their paid employment, a social expectation that heterosexual men do not experience.



Hochschild and Machung (2012) first conceptualized 'The Second Shift' over thirty years ago, describing the unequal burden of domestic labour presumed to be women's responsibility even when women work a 'first shift' outside the home. Gender inequality in the distribution of domestic labour within mother-father families with children has persisted with little statistically significant change, resulting in what has been called a stalled gender revolution (Bianchi et al., 2012; Geist & Ruppanner, 2018, Houle et al., 2015; Kamp Dush et al., 2107; Moyser & Burlock, 2018; Parker & Wang, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2015).

There are now several decades worth of studies suggesting that father involvement can have positive outcomes on children's development. Yet, one of the most under-acknowledged impacts of father involvement is on the well-being of mothers. Fathers who are positively involved provide a host of benefits to mothers not only to reduce their burden of domestic tasks but also to their mental health, well-being, and life satisfaction (Giurgescu & Templin, 2015; Mallette et al., 2015; McClain & Brown, 2016). Because they are often balancing childcare, household management, careers outside the home and, often, elder care, mothers in co-parenting relationships are frequently frustrated, resentful, and disillusioned with co-parenting (Perry et al., 2015). Studies find that mothers and fathers often agree that positive father involvement is important and is expressed in part through love and financial support. However, mothers also prioritize direct care tasks (feeding, hygiene, clothing, homework help) while fathers prioritize their roles as disciplinarian, protector, and playmate (Perry et al., 2015; Rushing & Powell, 2015).

Despite findings that point to unequal division of direct care tasks as a contributor to mothers' decreased health and wellness and to family

conflict and dissolution, there has been little public investment in supporting father's roles (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009). Father involvement has not been conceived as a means to reduce the burden on mothers or to support mothers' health or career progression; in other words, as a means to achieve greater gender equality in the home and women's sustained and successful advancement towards their own career, professional, and educational goals.

A relationship issue or a social issue?

When a couple is faced with challenges around division of household and care work, the difficulty is most often understood to be a problem in the relationship. Little attention is paid to the social forces that exempt fathers from participating in routine household responsibilities, including the policies and practices of social service professionals. For example, I have watched as women are told that if they are overwhelmed by household responsibilities and find that their male partners are not taking initiative and participating equally, they are ultimately to blame for the problem. They have been picking up his slack, not demanding enough of him, and not letting him experience the consequences of his negligent behaviour. Women, it would seem, have enabled men, allowing them to shrug off their obligations. Women should go on strike, or create chore charts, or withhold sex until a more equitable balance can be found. Once more, at the end of the day, the problem is her responsibility to solve.

Less time is spent considering how gendered expectations around care work operate at a social level, and how these expectations infiltrate and inform relationship expectations. Due to this, little investment is made in promoting father involvement at the level of policy and practice. In the

Canadian context, Quebec and Ontario are the only provinces with dedicated funding to support father involvement and, in Ontario, this funding amounts to only $55,000 a year provided to DadCentral, barely enough for a part time staff member.

Most fathers deeply value their role and want to be invested, involved co-parents. Yet there is little in our society designed to help them to do just that. Despite going into parenthood with every good intention, many men struggle with the gap between the kind of parent they hope to be and the kind of parent they are supported to be. This gap is created in no small part by a veritable tsunami of social forces that act to portray fathers as less capable, sometimes even dangerous caregivers. This includes popular media that perpetuates the deadbeat or incompetent dad trope as well as advertising that aims general baby or childcare products exclusively at mothers and parenting or prenatal programs that claim to be for "parents" but really only involve mothers. In my own experience exploring baby care programs to participate in with my husband in preparation for our child, I found that programs are almost always aimed at mothers, though a handful did offer something like a "dad's corner" with the information "every dad" seems to want to know, which often includes "when can we have sex again?" and the promise that if he is attentive and helps with the housework, it will be sooner rather than later. Both my husband and I found the baby preparation materials aimed at dads to be demeaning and dismissive.

Most parents-to-be have not been supported to sit down and have a conversation about what equality in their parenting relationship might look like. Typically, couples are left to sort out gender equality on their own with little acknowledgement of the social forces at work in establishing

and informing these relationship expectations. I recently developed a proposal for a post-natal parenting program. In my survey of available baby care programs available to Canadian parents, I have not been able to find a single baby care or parenting program or course in Canada that acknowledges gender equality as a critical issue in parenting relationships and one that is particularly important for women's wellbeing. Moms parent; dads help. If this is the norm in relationships, it is one that has been socially created and reinforced at every turn.

Mothers as the natural, default parent

While it may appear that policies and programs that primarily include women are helpful in promoting equality, in the end they collude with gender oppression by reinforcing the idea that mothers bear ultimate responsibility for house and home. Hidden in much of this dialogue is a kind of gender essentialism; the belief that gender is defined by deep, non-obvious and essential properties that make men and women who they are (Prentice & Miller, 2006; Skewes, Fine & Hasalm, 2018). Essentialist notions become especially apparent when considering parenting norms. It is presumed that women are, for example, more adept multitaskers which gives them the ability to juggle multiple household tasks at once (Conner et al., 2013). Women are said to have higher emotional intelligence (Korn Ferry, 2016). Men are portrayed as "fixers' while women are more natural "nurturers" (Denholm, 2012). These claims may be more difficult to understand as oppressive because, on the surface, they seem to be compliments. After all, they are acknowledging women as superior to men in these skills. However, claims like this also collude with gender oppression

by portraying women as essentially good at and best suited to the unpaid caregiving roles to which they have so long been confined.

Mother centrism as veiled sexism in child and youth care practice

Expecting mothers to be the primary parents while at the same time excluding and exempting fathers from household and caregiving responsibilities is a practice that ultimately enables the neo-liberal project. Rather than acknowledging care work as work and providing mothers with the safeguards they are entitled to as workers, these practices instead promote women's continued free labour without any such protections, leaving women overworked, unacknowledged, and vulnerable. Yet in all the talk about promoting gender equality in Canada, the idea that fathers should step up and participate in routine care work is continually overlooked. Canadian society is content to support mothers in their unpaid labour, particularly if it allows men to corner the job market.

Child and youth care workers are not immune to the sexist forces at work here and I am not an exception. When I worked as a home visitor, I only rarely encountered fathers and, in fact, I almost never asked about fathers at all. Files were labelled with the name of the mother and it was assumed that if there was a father in the family, he was absent or, ultimately, unimportant. Only on one occasion did I encounter a single father within my caseload. I was told that, for my own safety, I would need to find another worker to go with me to visit the family. Scheduling two over-worked professionals to go to a single visit was not a practical requirement and, I am ashamed to say, that father never received a visit. Eventually, circumstances changed, the mother re-entered the picture,

and the family was able to access services. That providing service to a father-led household was such a challenge speaks volumes to the way that fathers and their roles are understood in our practice.

Mother centrism is not an indicator of a society that is moving towards greater gender equality or that we are so deeply concerned with the plight of women. Instead, it manifests the dominant understanding that the primary caretaker should be a woman and, if it is not, we are at a loss about how to proceed. What is sometimes called "mother's privilege" is precisely the opposite; it is a form of continued oppression sold as "support" for women. Nowhere is the burden of "mother privilege" more apparent than in social responses to absent parents. If a father leaves, he will never receive a call from a social worker, he will only occasionally be held to account in the form of child support, and the likely reaction will be a mixture of pity and inevitability. It is not a privilege to be put or kept in a position where one is told that the brunt of childcare is ultimately the woman's responsibility while, at the same time, fathers are understood to be essentially less capable caregivers who can be given a pass on these responsibilities.

Conclusion

When policies and programs claiming to service families target only mothers, implicit in this is the understanding that children and households are, ultimately, a mother's responsibility. Child and youth care practice that views fathers as co-parents and not as "mother's helpers" and that holds men accountable as involved caregivers is needed to address this gap. This is not an issue of "father's rights," this is an issue of women's wellbeing. While much has been written about the academic, developmental, and

social benefits children and youth experience when there is a positively involved father, less attention has been paid to the way a father committed to gender equality might influence their children. How might this modelling from fathers move women's equality forward in future generations? For helping professionals across sectors, this means rethinking father involvement as a critical factor in gender equality. Central to this is interrogating the way that fathers are both exempted as well as excluded in child and youth care practice. Child and youth care professionals can begin working towards shifting this by using father inclusive language, producing content that shows competent and involved fathers and advocating for funding for father-specific programming. By expecting and supporting fathers to be fully involved and equal partners in childcare and home life, we can begin to relieve women of the expectation that the task of raising children is theirs alone. In addition, most fathers in mother-father partnerships want to be active, useful, responsible, and confident parents. To do this, they need to be given not only the opportunity to fully participate as equal parents, but the supports and encouragement to do so well.

When asked, I am sure most couples would respond that fairness and equality in their relationship is important to them. Yet parents, especially new parents, receive little guidance about how to navigate gender equality in their parenting. Child and youth care workers can help parents live into these values by calling on fathers to be the engaged and competent parents that they so often hope to be. This means intentionally seeking out and including fathers while at the same time giving mothers the chance, even the permission, to step back and prioritize their own needs, desires, and preferences. This is the kind of son I hope to raise; one who sees

equality as a part of his responsibility not only in his relationships, but in the society he participates in. One of the gifts I hope to give him is the experience of parents who, albeit imperfectly, made the value of equality a priority.

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JESSICA PRATEZINA *is a PhD student in Interdisciplinary Studies (Child and Youth Care; Sociology) at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Her PhD project is a study of gender equality, father involvement, and early family formation. She is also one of the few academics globally who specializes in children in cults/new religious movements. She has over a decade of experience as a front-line child and youth care practitioner working with vulnerable families.*

Author Note

I thank Dr. Jessica Ball for her review and feedback. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jessica Pratezina, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Victoria. Email: pratezina@gmail.com

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Beautiful Arts

Hans Skott-Myhre

I was recently re-watching the documentary "Call of the Mountain" about the founder of deep ecology, Arne Naess. I have written a bit about this documentary and Naess' thought in a previous column about ecology, care, and love. On this particular viewing, I was taken by a description of the Kantian distinction between a moral act and a beautiful act. The reading of Kant in the documentary is drawn from an article that Naess wrote on the implications of exploring the foundations of ethical action, as it pertains to tactical aspects of deep ecology. As someone deeply concerned about the world we are leaving the young people CYC is serving, I have an interest in both what Naess is saying about tactical interventions into the ecological crisis of this historical moment, as well as the practice implications for ethical action in the work we do in CYC. But, before I turn to the question of ethics and tactics, I want to note one other thing from the documentary that has struck me each time I have watched it and which I think has profound implications for the work we do.

In the film, Naess remarks on how he is often seen as a pessimist because of his deep critique of contemporary society and its devastating impacts on the ecology in which we are embedded. He takes issue with this reading of his work and activism and argues that he is instead an optimist, just not an optimist for the 21st century. Instead, he says he is an optimist for the 22nd century. Our current century he says, will be full of hardship, bad decisions, and ecological devastation. However, he argues

that this profoundly painful and destructive century will force us to revise our society in such a way as to survive the effects of our current actions. He is optimistic, that although it may take 100 years, we will adjust and persist. This is why he thinks of himself as an optimist.

I have to say that I share his perspective at a number of different levels. When I hear Naess working within such extended time frames, I am reminded of a story Gregory Bateson used to tell. The story is likely apocryphal but has to do with an ancient set of oak beams in the dining hall at New College Oxford. It seems that about 100 years ago or so, the beams were discovered to have an infestation of beetles that were weakening them structurally. This caused some dismay, as the kind and size of oak trees that were used to make beams of the width and length used in the dining hall had become quite scarce. In desperation, the college council reached out to the College Forester,

> *He pulled his forelock and said, "Well sirs, we was wonderin' when you'd be askin'."*
>
> *Upon further inquiry it was discovered that when the College was founded, a grove of oaks had been planted to replace the beams in the dining hall when they became beetly, because oak beams always become beetly in the end. This plan had been passed down from one Forester to the next for over five hundred years saying "You don't cut them oaks. Them's for the College Hall."*

Bateson would conclude the story by saying that this is the way to organize a society. That is to say, with an eye to the future at all times. In this case, preparing a solution to a problem foreseen 500 years in the future.

I think of this in the light of Naess' comments about optimism, because it seems to me that we can be quite myopic in our contemporary society. Often times, it would appear that we can only see the world through the lens of our current set of crises. We have a very hard time imagining a future that might operate on radically different terms. I read Bateson and Naess as suggesting that there is every reason to be pessimistic about the current state of affairs, while at the same time thinking through what we may need to do now, so that 100 years from now we have left a legacy that can be drawn on to solve the problems of the 22nd century.

This can only be done through action, of course. Which leads us to the question of the kinds of tactics that might have some chance of securing a future for young people of this generations and generations to come. One way we might think about this is in terms of right action. Right action stems from a Buddhist concept centered on intention. Specifically, right actions are those acts which originate in intentions associated with, non-attachment, benevolence and understanding, as opposed to action rooted in what Buddhist thought would characterize as negative intentions, of greed, hatred, and delusion.

The idea that, before we think of tactics, we should investigate our intentions, runs counter to western ethics founded on universal predetermined sets of rights or rules for living. To work from the intentions that form our actions is an intriguing way to think of how we form the

structures and rules for our programs in CYC, as well as the ways in which we construct our modes of practice.

For example, what are the intentions that drive rules about swearing or disrespect of staff? It seems unlikely that they are premised in principles of non-attachment, benevolence, or understanding. I would suggest that if we were non-attached, something like swearing or what we might see as disrespect might be read very differently. Perhaps, being less attached to our own sense of propriety or self-valorization as adults might allow us to engage in a process of understanding why young people might be angry with us. It might open up possibilities of benevolence through which we might see young people's struggles and the expressions of that struggle as worthy of deep consideration and compassion rather than judgement or censure. The Buddhist approach of right action would ask us to consider whether a rules based system of care is perhaps unconsciously or even unintentionally rooted in a kind of hatred of the young people we encounter in our work. I don't mean an overt and directed hatred, but the kind of hatred that dismisses the legitimacy of struggle over the power relations to be found in the adult-child binary, where the adult is always seen as in charge.

Regrettably, this kind of subtle hatred can be found with some regularity in the relationships between young people and adults. As adults, we often hold a sense of resentment and even envy when we encounter young people's inherent vitality and relatively larger degrees of freedom. It is not uncommon for us to want to assert the kind of order and control that would constrict the behaviors of young people in such a way that they would act more like adults. That is to say, to restrict their emotions, behaviors and aspirations so that they become increasingly conventional,

acceptable, and appropriate. Rather than admit our own frustrations with the ever increasing demands and restrictions placed on us as aspiring adults, we turn our self -hatred for who we are becoming on the young people who represent a lost freedom we once had.

Of course, this is a very ambivalent positioning. For many of us just entering the field, we want to celebrate youth and young people. We love their creativity and struggle within a society that so often neglects and dismisses them as living people while exploiting them as fully as possible as memes and algorithms. But, as we enter the institutions that serve the young people we desire to engage, we find ourselves conscripted into regimes of domination and control in the name of healing and safety. Over time, we become institutionalized and reflexively enforce the rules that place us at odds with the very young people we intended to love and support. I am not saying that love and support are not possible within behaviorally managed programs, but it has to occur either in the service of establishing order, or in the margins and cracks when no one is looking.

To ground our actions as workers in conventional sets of rules and expectations is what Kant would call moral action. That is to say, action that is engaged through a sense of moral duty. These kinds of actions are derived from the moral dictates and conventions of the historical and cultural milieu in which we are embedded. Certainly, rule based systems of care reiterated a across institutions of care for young people are saturated with moral acts. We act on behalf of our employers, who in turn are acting out a set of conventional ideas of what is right and wrong in relation to youth-adult relations. While we might find ourselves in agreement with the rules and regulations we are implementing, we are obligated to carry them out whether we agree with them or not. To be a good worker, in an

institutional context, is to be a compliant worker in terms of the needs and dictates of the institution in which we carry out our duties. If the program rules say that a certain set of behaviors is wrong, we are obligated to act in accordance with this set of moral precepts. This sense of obligation is key to Kant's notion of moral acts and something he felt was actually quite useful to establishing and maintaining a functioning social order.

Obligation, however, has some troubling implications for those of us interested in working within the CYC ethos of relational care. When one operates out of obligation, there is a certain amount of damage done to the kind of relationships that CYC would seem to promote. In particular, CYC has traditionally had an investment in a certain kind of work centered on an authentic encounter between young people and CYC workers. This kind of encounter is founded in the work of humanistic psychologist such as Carl Rogers and the theoretical foundations of existentialism as articulated by Jean Paul Sartre, In the case of Rogers, he proposed that relational work required what he called congruence or authenticity in order to be healing or transformative. For him, anyone seeking to engage others for the purpose of assisting them to live their lives more fully, needed to bring themselves fully into the encounter. There is a necessity for a kind of transparency in which what the worker is presenting to the young person is an accurate reflection of who they really are. To go back to the Buddhist notion of right action their deepest intention should be written on the surface of their actions. This is quite difficult to do, if not impossible, if one is acting out of obligation to rules and regulations based on standards of right and wrong determined by an institution or society writ large. The philosopher Sartre goes even further and proposes that acting out of the version of ourselves that is produced out of the conventional rules of

society, is to act in what he called bad faith. He suggests that to act in such a way is a betrayal of ourselves. That we diminish our living, creative capacities and become mere shadows of ourselves.

The problem with moral acts, as acts of obligation, is two-fold. In the first instance it reduces the integrity of the relational work we might be able to do with the young people we encounter in our work. In a perverse way, when we act out of obligation, the young person ceases to fully interact with us as a fellow human being and begins to interact with us as a functionary of the institution. We lose the real source of relational work which is the nature of the relationship itself. The kinds of relationship young people can have with another person who is living as fully as possible is very different from the kind of relationship they might have with an intermediary of the institution.

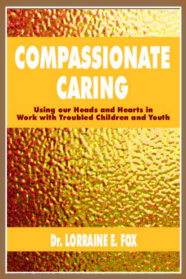
Let me clear, institutions cannot love anyone, care for anyone, listen to anyone, or protect anyone. Institutions are abstractions. They are made up of some kind of physical plant and flows of documents and money. The function of an institution is to continue itself as long as possible. Of course it has no ability to do that without a parasitic relationship with living persons who can think and act on its behalf.

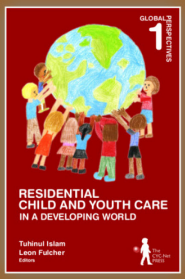
When the relationship between the institution and the people who create and support it functions on behalf of the people, that institution will cease to exist at the moment it serves its own interests over its initial purpose as a vehicle for humans working collectively to better meet their needs. On the other hand, when institutional needs for continuance take precedence over human needs, the institution becomes a predatory parasite that sucks the living energy out of anyone within its confines. Whenever we find ourselves working on behalf of institutional imperatives

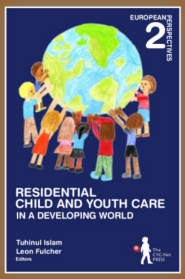
rather than human needs, we are in dangerous territory. A clue as to whether or not we are in trouble is the degree to which we are operating out of obligation rather than acting in congruence with our own creativity and living force.

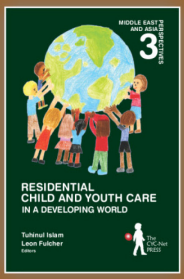
To act out of congruence with our own creativity and living force is to act out of what Kant called our own inclinations. These acts arise naturally and without effort. Kant called these beautiful acts, as opposed to moral acts. Beautiful acts flow within the ecological living imperatives of the moment, rather than by a sense of duty or obligation. Tactically, Naess proposes that they are far more useful in bringing about real and substantive change, because they arise easily and without effort. They are not acts of resistance, but acts of affirmation. In CYC, they would be the moments where we really connect with young people in a way that affirms both their lived experience, as well as our own. Under regimes of obligation and duty, beautiful acts are acts of revolt and revolution that move beyond the institution into the realm of a richer and deeper collectivity. I hope that, as we move from the depths of winter into spring in the northern hemisphere, we can learn to act beautifully in bringing about worlds in which we can all be free to act as fully as possible.

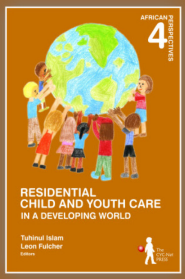
HANS SKOTT-MYHRE *is a regular writer for* CYC-Online*. He is a Professor of Social Work and Human Services at Kennesaw State University in Georgia (USA). He may be reached at hskottmy@kennesaw.edu*





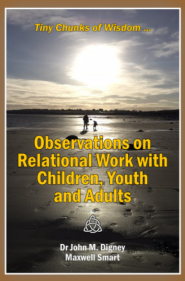


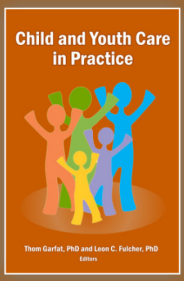


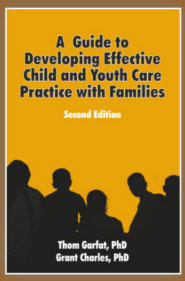


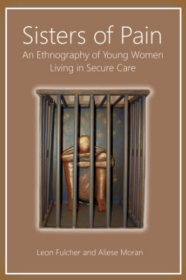


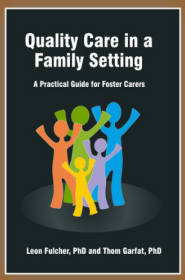


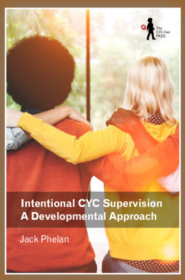


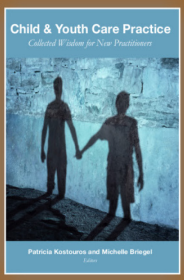


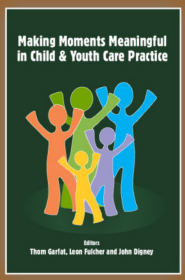


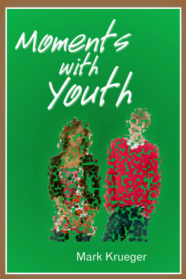


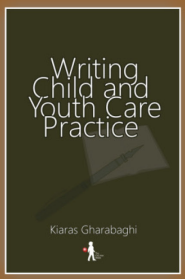


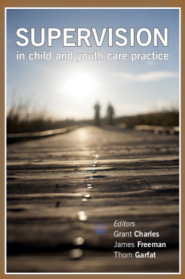


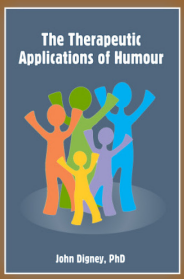


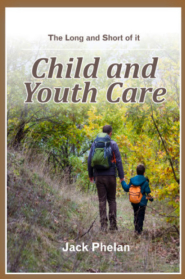












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Tribal Times

Garth Goodwin

These are indeed interesting days to be living through. The Omicron variant roared into existence in November and by January dominated literally ballooning the numbers for the infected and hospitalized. Provincial and State governments crumbled under the onslaught admitting there was little they could do to prevent the spread. As if to underscore the point daily tallies of workers, flights and rail schedules falling to Omicron by the hundreds to thousands expose the growing realization that things no longer work the way they did. No longer is life a blur of untold options for transit, dining and entertainment with thousands on the move in a constant flow of humanity. Rather, interruptions, brownouts and burnouts are becoming the new norm. Curiously, in the face of the many cancelations a kind of blowback is emerging. In the world of child and youth care the Child and Youth Care Association of Alberta has announced a national conference for Canmore, Alberta in October 2022. To hedge their bets, the announcement outlines a hard reality event alongside a virtual component for those who cannot attend. The announcement and call for papers to come tug at deep tribal heartstrings on one hand and a pronounced yearning to break out of the shallow living of the last few years to experience a different place and to interact with old and new faces. Thom Garfat, in one of his many keynotes I believe in Winnipeg in 2010; introduced the concept of the child and youth care tribe to identify those who regularly attend the biannual conferences.

Thom along with Leon Fulcher would go on to host gatherings for a global audience and with Heather Modlin would introduce the global child and youth care conference movement. Each reinforced the tribal concept, and it all came to an end with the pandemic. Social interaction has been reduced to the personal home level shattering tribal bonds with a profound and alarming polarization that threatens democracy itself developing. This column will explore aspects of tribalization.

It is the case that you do not know what you had until it is gone. Tribal connections are a blend of identity and belonging. The process of tribal connecting begins early, perhaps as early as playdates for toddlers. Certainly, by childhood. In my case bible studies at a neighbour's house. We lived so far north missionaries went to the trouble to come there to ensure we had religion which we did for several years until we approached adolescence and more worldly concerns ended such studies. Along the way, both in the community and especially in school the various sports, intellectual and game activities were offered and brought new levels of identity and belonging.

Youth at risk tend to build their identities privately often being alone in situations they would rather not want to be in. They often come into care with a built-in resistance to social and team pursuits. One of my key kids wanted to play ringette and this became a mission outfitting her in what was becoming expensive gear to have her play protected. The first game came along. Her skating skills were basic, even tentative so the coach put her in the crease as the goalie. As she skated out that first game, achingly slow with halting steps, the parents in the stands began with the comments, the dissing and the taunting. She persisted and did not badly

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in goal so attended for the season giving it up in the end severing ties with that tribe.

The child and youth care association movement became my tribe. The notion of developing the field of child and youth care was exciting and involved staging conferences at provincial and national levels. Over time delegates and board members became more familiar and friendly. Setbacks on the career path with the closing of group homes and the loss of significant teams only intensified those connections. The gatherings and world conference movement extended it even more until it had to end rather suddenly with the pandemic. Social media has allowed the sharing of news, insights, and support with members of the tribe making this remarkable isolation of the pandemic tolerable.



Quite suddenly in late January a so-called Freedom Convoy emerged in Canada involving semi truckers protesting the mandating of vaccination. They drove across the nation to the capital in Ottawa to stage their protest becoming a significant example of tribal creation in the process. With each provincial capital the convoy grew becoming quite large, around 15,000. It retained its identity and goal until it came to rest clogging all but one lane of the main road in front of the Parliament buildings. Then things became dynamic and dramatic as the Confederate flags emerged, the swastika's, someone thought it totally cool to hop up on the grave or our unknown soldier and do a little jig. The convoy prepared to nest building a canteen, setting up bouncy castles, bringing in saunas and setting up supply sources for the protestors. Initially, there were large rallies on the weekends with a long-term group settling in for the long term complete with bellowing truck air horns and fireworks in the evenings. One man's tribal ways are another man's terror and trauma. This went on for ten days or so before a judge's order noting horns and noise cannot be part of protest. The trucks fell silent in response. It was the first hint of Canadian good manners returning.

No one wants to budge on their positions on mandates yet. For me, it was a no brainer to get on board and go to the trouble of getting the jab. They used our convention center in my city as they wanted to emphasize the 6 metres of separation though out. The medical community took shifts doing the actual vaccinations and they were so slick about it you had no idea it was done. Now, vaccinations are available at clinics and pharmacies, even those in supermarkets. The country has almost caught up to its truckers, 90% of whom responded to the call here and in the United States that to do so due to their cross-border travel. Each level continues to inch

up with the booster shot going over 50%. As a former child and youth care professional who put good health first for both youth in care and those working with them it was natural to be vaccinated. My province just specified *youth in group homes*, spelling it out for booster shots for adolescents. The numbers isolate the protesters to a small minority and the behaviour of several thousand who just hopped on have reduced that even further. In group care, *unworkable*, a term for those youth who could not respond to care due to intense anger, acting out, causing harm to others, breaking laws and running away constantly was part of the experience. The thought has crossed my mind that they have aged into a minority of perhaps a million or so who view freedom as their right to do and say exactly what they want. Various tribes including the far right and white supremist groups pepper the protest population. It reminds one of Hillary Clinton's 'basket of deplorables' from the 2016 Presidential campaign. This writer wandered into this kind of territory using the word pantywaist in the January column. In my childhood the word was a trigger calling on the receiver to try harder, toughen up, learn the skill or play the game. Unfortunately, the word went on in subsequent decades to gather less complimentary meanings and references: emotional and sexual risking muddling my point. Perhaps another take is called for. A.S. Neill, the founder of a school/residential movement for youth at risk summed up his approach as Freedom, not licence underlining that our freedoms are linked to our responsibilities. It is so ingrained in me I had forgotten but it works in almost every human experience involving another. This suggests a rather obvious label for the anti-mandate cohort, the irresponsible's. Dan Bilefsky writing in the New York Times noted:

> "During the pandemic, repeated polls have shown that a majority of Canadians support public health measures to contain the pandemic, but the number of Canadians who would like to see restrictions end has risen in recent weeks, and the demonstrations have tapped into pandemic fatigue across the country after months of lockdowns.
>
> More than two-thirds of Canadians said they had "very little in common" with how the Ottawa protesters see things, while 32 percent said they had "a lot in common," according to a survey conducted last week by Abacus Data, a research firm." [1]

It has been a long slog indeed and the pent-up craving to be mask free, with open travel, gathering, office space, recreation and dining is significant. It is interesting that the numbers are similar to the irresponsible's in the United States built up in the Trump era. Recently, the Governor of Florida jumped in regarding the fund raising for the convoy being cancelled and the totally irresponsible Fox television network is jumping all over it trying to spin to a global status.

The Freedom Convoy goes on with echo blockades in Windsor, Winnipeg, and Coutts. Several counties and just announced, three Canadian provinces are lifting all their mandates with a few more seeing Spring as the target date. I remain uncomfortable and had to decline an international invitation due to this. The system remains uncertain and tentative as mentioned. It is like the entire world has become a reality show with Covid-19 applied the rule of the Big Brother series: *expect the*

[1] Ending Protest Requires More Police, Ottawa Chief Says - The New York Times (nytimes.com)

unexpected. The virus has connived its way across the world and is now focusing upon the youth and children. While they have more resilience death continues in significant numbers, we have grown numb to it. The Olympics are taking place in a closed loop as they call it, no one enters without showing clear in constant testing. The Olympians and their teams and the media delegations are the only audience. There is constant spraying, testing and immediate removal to quarantine if you test positive. Still, people come down with Covid and here we do not see it. Ironically, this began for me with those first refrigerated semi units being used as morgues in New York. This approach was soon overwhelmed, and mass graves were dug in those first months. Covid will be with us forever, like the flu they say. It will take a hypersensitivity by the medical systems to read the wind and call the tribe back for a booster vaccination.

GARTH GOODWIN *spent his 41-year career in both practice and as a database designer and administrator. In over 30 years of frontline practice he worked for both public/board and private agencies. He was the first recipient of the National Child and Youth Care Award in 1986. He nurtured the Child and Youth Care Workers Association of Manitoba through its formative years and became its representative to the Council of Canadian Child and Youth Care Associations. He has been privileged to be the witness and participant in significant events in CYC history and remains an active observer in the field of CYC.*

Five reasons to stop saying "Good Job!"

Alfie Kohn

Hang out at a playground, visit a school, or show up at a child's birthday party, and there's one phrase you can count on hearing repeatedly: "Good job!" Even tiny infants are praised for smacking their hands together ("Good clapping!"). Many of us blurt out these judgments of our children to the point that it has become almost a verbal tic.

Plenty of books and articles advise us against relying on punishment, from spanking to forcible isolation ("time out"). Occasionally someone will even ask us to rethink the practice of bribing children with stickers or food. But you'll have to look awfully hard to find a discouraging word about what is euphemistically called positive reinforcement.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, the point here is not to call into question the importance of supporting and encouraging children, the need to love them and hug them and help them feel good about themselves. Praise, however, is a different story entirely. Here's why.

1. Manipulating children

Suppose you offer a verbal reward to reinforce the behavior of a two-year-old who eats without spilling, or a five-year-old who cleans up her art

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supplies. Who benefits from this? Is it possible that telling kids they've done a good job may have less to do with their emotional needs than with our convenience?

Rheta DeVries, a professor of education at the University of Northern Iowa, refers to this as "sugar-coated control." Very much like tangible rewards – or, for that matter, punishments – it's a way of doing something to children to get them to comply with our wishes. It may be effective at producing this result (at least for a while), but it's very different from working with kids – for example, by engaging them in conversation about what makes a classroom (or family) function smoothly, or how other people are affected by what we have done – or failed to do. The latter approach is not only more respectful but more likely to help kids become thoughtful people.

The reason praise can work in the short run is that young children are hungry for our approval. But we have a responsibility not to exploit that dependence for our own convenience. A "Good job!" to reinforce something that makes our lives a little easier can be an example of taking advantage of children's dependence. Kids may also come to feel manipulated by this, even if they can't quite explain why.

2. Creating praise junkies

To be sure, not every use of praise is a calculated tactic to control children's behavior. Sometimes we compliment kids just because we're genuinely pleased by what they've done. Even then, however, it's worth looking more closely. Rather than bolstering a child's self-esteem, praise may increase kids' dependence on us. The more we say, "I like the way you"." or "Good – ing," the more kids come to rely on our evaluations, our decisions about

what's good and bad, rather than learning to form their own judgments. It leads them to measure their worth in terms of what will lead us to smile and dole out some more approval.

Mary Budd Rowe, a researcher at the University of Florida, discovered that students who were praised lavishly by their teachers were more tentative in their responses, more apt to answer in a questioning tone of voice ("Um, seven?"). They tended to back off from an idea they had proposed as soon as an adult disagreed with them. And they were less likely to persist with difficult tasks or share their ideas with other students.

In short, "Good job!" doesn't reassure children; ultimately, it makes them feel less secure. It may even create a vicious circle such that the more we slather on the praise, the more kids seem to need it, so we praise them some more. Sadly, some of these kids will grow into adults who continue to need someone else to pat them on the head and tell them whether what they did was OK. Surely this is not what we want for our daughters and sons.

3. Stealing a child's pleasure

Apart from the issue of dependence, a child deserves to take delight in her accomplishments, to feel pride in what she's learned how to do. She also deserves to decide when to feel that way. Every time we say, "Good job!", though, we're telling a child how to feel.

To be sure, there are times when our evaluations are appropriate and our guidance is necessary – especially with toddlers and preschoolers. But a constant stream of value judgments is neither necessary nor useful for children's development. Unfortunately, we may not have realized that "Good job!" is just as much an evaluation as "Bad job!" The most notable

feature of a positive judgment isn't that it's positive, but that it's a judgment. And people, including kids, don't like being judged.

I cherish the occasions when my daughter manages to do something for the first time, or does something better than she's ever done it before. But I try to resist the knee-jerk tendency to say, "Good job!" because I don't want to dilute her joy. I want her to share her pleasure with me, not look to me for a verdict. I want her to exclaim, "I did it!" (which she often does) instead of asking me uncertainly, "Was that good?"

4. Losing interest

"Good painting!" may get children to keep painting for as long as we keep watching and praising. But, warns Lilian Katz, one of the country's leading authorities on early childhood education, "once attention is withdrawn, many kids won't touch the activity again." Indeed, an impressive body of scientific research has shown that the more we reward people for doing something, the more they tend to lose interest in whatever they had to do to get the reward. Now the point isn't to draw, to read, to think, to create – the point is to get the goody, whether it's an ice cream, a sticker, or a "Good job!"

In a troubling study conducted by Joan Grusec at the University of Toronto, young children who were frequently praised for displays of generosity tended to be slightly less generous on an everyday basis than other children were. Every time they had heard "Good sharing!" or "I'm so proud of you for helping," they became a little less interested in sharing or helping. Those actions came to be seen not as something valuable in their own right but as something they had to do to get that reaction again from an adult. Generosity became a means to an end.

Does praise motivate kids? Sure. It motivates kids to get praise. Alas, that's often at the expense of commitment to whatever they were doing that prompted the praise.

5. Reducing achievement

As if it weren't bad enough that "Good job!" can undermine independence, pleasure, and interest, it can also interfere with how good a job children actually do. Researchers keep finding that kids who are praised for doing well at a creative task tend to stumble at the next task – and they don't do as well as children who weren't praised to begin with.

Why does this happen? Partly because the praise creates pressure to "keep up the good work" that gets in the way of doing so. Partly because their interest in what they're doing may have declined. Partly because they become less likely to take risks – a prerequisite for creativity – once they start thinking about how to keep those positive comments coming.

More generally, "Good job!" is a remnant of an approach to psychology that reduces all of human life to behaviors that can be seen and measured. Unfortunately, this ignores the thoughts, feelings, and values that lie behind behaviors. For example, a child may share a snack with a friend as a way of attracting praise, or as a way of making sure the other child has enough to eat. Praise for sharing ignores these different motives. Worse, it actually promotes the less desirable motive by making children more likely to fish for praise in the future.

Once you start to see praise for what it is – and what it does – these constant little evaluative eruptions from adults start to produce the same effect as fingernails being dragged down a blackboard. You begin to root for a child to give his teachers or parents a taste of their own treacle by

turning around to them and saying (in the same saccharine tone of voice), “Good praising!”

Still, it’s not an easy habit to break. It can seem strange, at least at first, to stop praising; it can feel as though you’re being chilly or withholding something. But that, it soon becomes clear, suggests that we praise more because we need to say it than because children need to hear it. Whenever that’s true, it’s time to rethink what we’re doing.

What kids do need is unconditional support, love with no strings attached. That’s not just different from praise – it’s the opposite of praise. “Good job!” is conditional. It means we’re offering attention and acknowledgement and approval for jumping through our hoops, for doing things that please us.

This point, you'll notice, is very different from a criticism that some people offer to the effect that we give kids too much approval, or give it too easily. They recommend that we become more miserly with our praise and demand that kids “earn” it. But the real problem isn’t that children expect to be praised for everything they do these days. It’s that we’re tempted to take shortcuts, to manipulate kids with rewards instead of explaining and helping them to develop needed skills and good values.

So what’s the alternative? That depends on the situation, but whatever we decide to say instead has to be offered in the context of genuine affection and love for who kids are rather than for what they've done. When unconditional support is present, “Good job!” isn’t necessary; when it’s absent, “Good job!” won’t help.

If we’re praising positive actions as a way of discouraging misbehavior, this is unlikely to be effective for long. Even when it works, we can’t really say the child is now “behaving himself"; it would be more accurate to say

the praise is behaving him. The alternative is to work with the child, to figure out the reasons he's acting that way. We may have to reconsider our own requests rather than just looking for a way to get kids to obey. (Instead of using "Good job!" to get a four-year-old to sit quietly through a long class meeting or family dinner, perhaps we should ask whether it's reasonable to expect a child to do so.)

We also need to bring kids in on the process of making decisions. If a child is doing something that disturbs others, then sitting down with her later and asking, "What do you think we can do to solve this problem?" will likely be more effective than bribes or threats. It also helps a child learn how to solve problems and teaches that her ideas and feelings are important. Of course, this process takes time and talent, care and courage. Tossing off a "Good job!" when the child acts in the way we deem appropriate takes none of those things, which helps to explain why "doing to" strategies are a lot more popular than "working with" strategies.

And what can we say when kids just do something impressive? Consider three possible responses:

- Say nothing. Some people insist a helpful act must be "reinforced" because, secretly or unconsciously, they believe it was a fluke. If children are basically evil, then they have to be given an artificial reason for being nice (namely, to get a verbal reward). But if that cynicism is unfounded – and a lot of research suggests that it is – then praise may not be necessary.
- Say what you saw. A simple, evaluation-free statement ("You put your shoes on by yourself" or even just "You did it") tells your child that you noticed. It also lets her take pride in what she did. In other

cases, a more elaborate description may make sense. If your child draws a picture, you might provide feedback – not judgment – about what you noticed: “This mountain is huge!” “Boy, you sure used a lot of purple today!”

- If a child does something caring or generous, you might gently draw his attention to the effect of his action on the other person: “Look at Abigail’s face! She seems pretty happy now that you gave her some of your snack.” This is completely different from praise, where the emphasis is on how you feel about her sharing.
- Talk less, ask more. Even better than descriptions are questions. Why tell him what part of his drawing impressed you when you can ask him what he likes best about it? Asking “What was the hardest part to draw?” or “How did you figure out how to make the feet the right size?” is likely to nourish his interest in drawing. Saying “Good job!”, as we've seen, may have exactly the opposite effect.

This doesn’t mean that all compliments, all thank-yous, all expressions of delight are harmful. We need to consider our motives for what we say (a genuine expression of enthusiasm is better than a desire to manipulate the child's future behavior) as well as the actual effects of doing so. Are our reactions helping the child to feel a sense of control over her life” or to constantly look to us for approval? Are they helping her to become more excited about what she’s doing in its own right – or turning it into something she just wants to get through in order to receive a pat on the head.

It's not a matter of memorizing a new script, but of keeping in mind our long-term goals for our children and watching for the effects of what we say. The bad news is that the use of positive reinforcement really isn't so positive. The good news is that you don't have to evaluate in order to encourage.

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Postcard from Leon Fulcher

From New Zealand, engaging with Celebrations and Protests



New Zealand sent 15 Olympians - 9 men & 6 women - to the 2022 Winter Olympics

Kia Ora Kotou Katoa and Warm Greetings to each of you! We hope this finds you keeping well during these Pandemic times, and also that you are finding opportunity moments each day in your work and home life after lock-down. Many of our Northern Hemisphere friends have been locked down days now after heavy snows. Others of us are riding the wave of Omicron with heavy duty outbreaks happening in our World. Imagine getting everyone in Hong Kong tested for Covid and curbing Freedom Convoy activities in Ottawa and the Canada-US border.

In spite of Freedom Protests starting at roughly the same time as 2022 Beijing, most New Zealanders were glued to daily Olympics broadcasts. As in most countries during Olympic Games, national TV tends to focus on

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their own athletes. It was like that for New Zealand having never ever won a Winter Olympics Gold. New Zealand's best ever was a 1992 Silver in Alpine skiing.



New Zealand's First Ever Gold Medal awarded to Zoi Sadowski-Synnott

New Zealand's Zoi Sadowski-Synnott won a Bronze Medal as a 16-year-old at the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea. She won both Gold and Silver Medals in snowboarding competitions at Beijing 2022. Gold Medallist Nico Porteous come from the same South Island town of Wanaka, a world-class centre for skiing and snowboarding. Olympics teams from different Northern Hemisphere countries spend their summer in New Zealand's Southern Alps.



Zoi Sadowski-Synnott winner of both Gold and Silver Medals

The events which won New Zealand's first-ever Gold Medals are so different from everything I ever learned about skiing. It has been fun to watch local children heading off the local half-pipe with their skateboards or head off to trampoline centres to practice their moves.



Snowboard Slope Style & Big Air Events along with Halfpipe Freestyle Skiing

New Zealand retailers are sold out of snowboards for the new season that starts in 3 months! Children and young people have new role models. And as New Zealand classrooms, especially in Auckland, fall under the spell of Omicron it is good to see how masks are now acceptable.



Nico Porteous won the Gold Medal in Men's Halfpipe Freestyle Skiing

Having been glued to the Alpine and Curling events that ran throughout Beijing 2022, I kept thinking about how successes and failures

are monitored and practised by young people engaged in different kinds of activity. Role models are really important. No child and youth care worker should ever underestimate their potential as an important role model in children's lives.



Meanwhile Freedom Protests and Anti-Vaxer Occupations proceed

And just as the Beijing 2022 Olympics started, so it was that New Zealand started having its own Freedom from Mandates protest unfolding outside Wellington's Parliamentary Centre. What I find interesting about this protest is how few students and young people have joined the Freedom Convoy. More than 27,000 local university students have signed a petition demanding that their campus be taken back from the protestors.



The protestors set up camp in front of Parliament and have remained for 16 days

Needless to say, rain, bad weather, traffic congestion, intimidating behaviour towards local residents and secondary school students has also

raised alarm. Two local Colleges have been closed because students have intimidated and spat at on their walk to school for wearing masks.

No politicians have been willing to talk with the protestors because of their intimidating and threatening behaviour. The message shouted by the Freedom Convoy protestors is that "*nobody is gonna tell me what to do!*" I wonder what gaps have there been in primary, secondary and tertiary education led to citizens to deny some of the most basic tenets of science and medicine? Does education make one think? Or does education involve getting the right answers on tests? How much do we encourage young people to become critical thinkers open to ideas? Stay well!



New Zealanders question where disparate protestors get their misinformation!



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Thom Garfat and Brian Gannon (1939-2017)

Managing Editor
Martin Stabrey

Associate Editors
Dr Mark Smith, James Freeman, Janice Daley, Dr Shemine Gulamhusein

Correspondence
The Editors welcome correspondence at cyconline@cyc-net.org

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