



Child and Youth Care Practice with Families A Relational Approach

Kelly Shaw, Jenny McGrath, Thom Garfat

Editors

Child and Youth Care Practice with Families: A Relational Approach

Kelly Shaw, Jenny McGrath, Thom Garfat

Editors

Child and Youth Care Practice with Families: A Relational Approach

Kelly Shaw, Jenny McGrath, Thom Garfat / Editors

Copyright © 2026 CYC-Net Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photography, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers. The book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade, or otherwise, be lent, resold, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.



<https://press.cyc-net.org>

Contents

Introduction vii

Jenny McGrath and Kelly Shaw

Part I: Foundations: Understanding Relational Family Practice

These chapters establish the philosophical and pedagogical foundation

Relational Child and Youth Care Practice with Families..... 11

Thom Garfat and Leon Fulcher

**Co-Creating Safety with Families: Using Attachment Theory to
Engage in Trauma-Informed, Responsive Care43**

Kristy Dellebuur O'Connor and Jessica Williams

Becoming a Relational Family Support Practitioner: The Journey61

Jack Phelan

**From Group Care to Family Home: A Child and Youth Care 70
Approach to Working with Families**

Kelly Shaw

Activity-Based Experiential Family Work84

Rebecca Stiller

Part II: Principles for Practice

These chapters are about relational conditions that practitioners encounter across contexts

**From Barriers to Bridges: Advancing Family Inclusion in
Child and Youth Care 96**

Luke Carty and Mardi Ennis

**Grief in Family Work: Supporting Presence, Connection,
and Healing106**

Parker Pothier and Jenny McGrath

Part III: Family Experiences in Context

These chapters illustrate what relational family practice looks like in diverse family experiences

A Mother's Journey: Embedding the Voice of Lived Experience in Child and Youth Care	120
Christina Sackett, with Pennie Sibbald and Virginia Hervey	
Grandfamilies: Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren through a Child and Youth Care Lens	129
Janice Daley	
Supporting Siblings at the Intersection of Disability	139
Ashlyn Ganske	
Adoptive Families	150
Kelly Cassano	
Bearing Witness: Supporting Families of Justice-Involved Youth Through a Child and Youth Care Lens	163
Nicole Mizzi	

Part IV: Expanding Practice Across Communities and Systems

These chapters demonstrate how relational practice is adapted within different programs, cultures, and systems and broadens the lens from individual family experiences to organizational and international practice

Working with Families New to Canada: A Child and Youth Care Perspective	179
Heather Modlin and Laura Aguirre Polo	
Relational Pathways to Family Strengthening in India's Child Protection Landscape	193
Kiran Modi, Gurneet Kaur Kalra, Leena Prasad and Asoni Grace	
Showing Up: Relational Child and Youth Care Practice with Families in South Africa Through the Isibindi Model	208
Zeni Thumbadoo	

When Mandate Meets Meaning: Relational Practice and The Power of Coming Alongside.....	220
Andrea K. Furlong and Renee Piercey	
 Part V: Towards Voice, Rights, and Advocacy	
<i>This chapter closes the book with the importance of rights and advocacy while also pointing toward the future of family work in CYC practice</i>	
Moving Beyond Tokenism: Centering Child and Youth Rights, Voice, and Choice in Family Work	232
Emmie Henderson-Dekort	
 Conclusion	
Carrying the Conversation Forward	245
Kelly Shaw, Jenny McGrath and Thom Garfat	
Contributors.....	247

Introduction

Jenny McGrath and Kelly Shaw

Why This Book?

During a gathering of Child and Youth Care practitioners and educators held before the Unity Conference in 2024, participants identified the need for a new resource focused on working with families from a Child and Youth Care perspective. While *Child and Youth Care Practice with Families* (Fulcher & Garfat, 2015) has served as a foundational text in CYC education, the continued evolution of the profession has created a need for a resource that reflects contemporary practice and acknowledges that our understanding of relational family work continues to deepen through the experiences of practitioners, families, and researchers. A subsequent call for chapter submissions received an overwhelming response, demonstrating the commitment of practitioners and educators to advancing family practice within the field.

We are deeply grateful to Thom and Leon for their generosity, encouragement, and unwavering support in bringing this book to life. Both have made enduring contributions to relational Child and Youth Care practice, shaping the thinking and practice of generations of practitioners and educators. We are appreciative of Thom's thoughtful editorial guidance throughout this project. His willingness to read drafts, ask difficult questions, challenge our thinking, and offer steady encouragement strengthened both the manuscript and our confidence as editors.

We also extend our appreciation to all the authors who generously shared their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives. Together, their contributions create a collection that reflects the diversity, complexity, and significance of family work across Child and Youth Care contexts. Collectively, they affirm that families are not peripheral to Child and Youth Care practice – they are central to it. It is our hope that *Child and Youth Care Practice with Families: A Relational Approach* reflects the ongoing evolution of the profession while

contributing to our continually deepening understanding of relational approaches to working with children, youth, and families.

Family at the Heart of Child and Youth Care Practice

At its core, this book is grounded in the belief that working with families is not a specialized area of Child and Youth Care practice; it is fundamental to ethical and effective practice. Regardless of practice setting, children and youth are connected to families, relationships, communities, and broader social systems that shape their experiences. Meaningful Child and Youth Care practice therefore requires engaging with families through a relational lens by recognizing their strengths, respecting their expertise, and understanding the context and lifespace in which they live.

Throughout this book, relationships are presented not simply as a practice skill, but as the foundation upon which responsive, ethical, and effective family work is built. Relational practice requires practitioners to consider not only the circumstances of families' lives, but also their own assumptions, values, responses, and ways of 'being in relationship'. Family work begins with understanding, connection, and partnership.

A Relational Approach to Family Practice

Throughout this book, readers will encounter interconnected ideas that shape relational Child and Youth Care practice with families. Across the chapters, relationships are understood as both the foundation and the process of practice, requiring practitioners to engage with families through reflection, and with humility, and ethical intention. Families are recognized as partners whose lived experiences, knowledge, strengths, and voices are essential to meaningful collaboration.

Practice is situated within the broader contexts of culture, community, policy, and systems, recognizing that families' experiences are shaped by social conditions and the environments in which they live. Relational family practice requires clear and respectful communication, attention to rights and advocacy, and a commitment to ongoing learning through supervision, mentorship, and reflective practice. Together, these themes invite readers to understand family

work not as a collection of techniques, but as a relational way of being with children, youth, and their families.

A Resource for Learning, Practice, and Reflection

We compiled this book first and foremost for students and emerging Child and Youth Care practitioners. Our intention was to create a resource that is accessible and engaging, using clear language while remaining grounded in theory, CYC frameworks, and the complexity of everyday practice. We also hope the book will be meaningful for educators, practicum supervisors, experienced practitioners, and those from related disciplines who seek to deepen their understanding of relational family practice.

Although the focus of this book is working with families, the themes explored throughout extend well beyond family-focused courses and perspectives. Relational practice, ethics, trauma-informed approaches, diversity, advocacy, communication, collaboration, and professional identity are central to Child and Youth Care education and practice more broadly. The chapters reflect diverse family experiences, cultural contexts, and practice environments, recognizing that relational practice must be responsive to the uniqueness of each family, community, and circumstance.

The book unfolds in five parts, taking readers on a journey from foundational understandings of relational family practice to the complexities of applying this approach across diverse experiences, communities, and systems. Beginning with the values, theories, and professional formation that shape family work in ways that are similar and different than other practice contexts, the chapters then explore principles for practice, lived experiences of families, and the ways relational approaches are adapted within different contexts. The book concludes by looking toward the future of Child and Youth Care practice, emphasizing voice, rights, advocacy, and the ongoing responsibility of practitioners to strengthen relationships with children, youth, and families.

Looking Forward

As editors, we invite readers to approach this book with generosity, curiosity, and openness. The chapters that follow do not offer simple answers;

rather, they invite reflection, dialogue, and continued learning through the diverse experiences, perspectives, and questions explored throughout the book.

We hope readers recognize the courage and expertise of families, honour the relational work of practitioners, and remain committed to asking meaningful questions. Above all, we hope this book sparks conversation, challenges assumptions, affirms practice, and support readers in continuing to develop their own relational way of being with children, youth, and families.

Relational Child and Youth Care Practice with Families

Thom Garfat and Leon Fulcher

Relational Child and Youth Care practices are fluid and ever evolving. We introduce this volume by exploring further ways in which the 25 characteristics of a Relational Child and Youth Care approach to practice extend to working with families – whenever and wherever possible. Our aim is for Relational Child and Youth Care practitioners to ‘think family’ in all they do, and to actively pursue opportunities for family members to engage in restorative processes.

Introduction

Relational practice has been evolving in the Child & Youth Care (CYC) field for some time (See, for example, the 1st issue of the journal *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice*, 2003 published over 20 years ago). Digney (2025) noted in his introduction to the Unity 2025 conference “Relational Practice as a concept within the caring professions (including Child & Youth Care, Social Care, Social Work, Education, Medicine, Psychology, etc.), has grown from the work of many pioneers over recent decades” (Digney, 2025, np.). Thus, we see that Relational Practice is not unique to Child & Youth Care. Cleece et al. (2025) claimed that “Relational practice is pivotal to social work and is vital for meaningful intervention”. So, in CYC we are not alone with this focus.

However, while Relational Practice has continued to evolve across many professions, as noted by Lamph, et al (2023, p. 1) we “do not yet share a well-defined common understanding of relational practice”. Yet, as we shall see, Relational Practice is evolving its potential and definition within Child & Youth Care. As Gharabaghi said:

“Relational practices are a conceptual framework that holds enormous value and potential for practice as well as for theoretical development within the field of child and youth care. But like so many other great concepts, we are prone to simplify this one, consider it interchangeable with predecessor concepts such as relationship-based practice.” (Gharabaghi, 2024, para.8).

Relational Child & Youth Care practice is distinct from other relational approaches in that it is founded on the 25 characteristics of Relational Child & Youth Care Practice (Garfat et al, 2018) and is focused on both *how we are in relationship* and *the in-between between us* (Garfat, 2008), This differentiates it, as well, from what has been historically called ‘relationship-based practice’ as Relational Child & Youth Care practice focuses on the characteristics of the relationship itself, rather than on the individual participants and their actions, which is common in other fields. In Relational Child & Youth Care practice we are constantly focused on the in-between between us. For example, “Is it a place of safety, a place of pain, a place of learning or fear?” The B.I.D. (Being, Interpreting, Doing) model frames the process of intervention for Relational Child & Youth Care Practice (Freeman & Garfat, 2014). As van der Westhuizen and Garfat (2024) stated, “Relational CYC Practice is a way of being in the world with others in which the focus is on moments of connection and togetherness (Gharabaghi, 2019), which is appropriate as most of our problems in communities are rooted in our disconnection from one another (Freeman, 2021)” (para. 10).

We assert that Relational Child and Youth Care practice with families is potentially the most dynamic and effective approach to helping families and family members live their lives differently and with less pain.

Historically, Child and Youth Care was considered a sub-profession and the practitioners themselves were considered subservient to other helping professionals, most commonly Social Workers (Garfat & Charles, 2010). However, with the continuing evolution of a distinct method of practice, Child and Youth Care practitioners (CYCPs) have come to be recognized as having particular expertise and a unique approach to working with children, young people and families (Fulcher & Garfat, 2008; Garfat, 2004).

Because Relational Child & Youth Care practitioners are engaged with the family in the everyday moments of their lives, this allows them to intervene pro-actively, responsively and immediately to help the family and family members learn new ways of being, acting and experiencing, in the moment, in their world (Bureau, 2005; Fulcher & Garfat, 2008). This immediacy of intervention creates ‘in-the-moment learning opportunities’ that permit families and family members to experiment with new ways of interacting with and experiencing others as they are living their lives. Relational Child and Youth Care practice with families is based on being *in-the-moment* with the family and family members, experiencing with them their life and living as it unfolds (Baizerman, 1999; Garfat & Charles, 2010).

Relational Child and Youth Care practice with families is based on helping families and family members live their lives differently as they are living it (Garfat, 2002; Garfat et. al., 2024). Such practice is focused, timely and practical. Relational Child and Youth Care practice with families is an immediately responsive form of helping which uses “applied learning and daily knowledge to inform more responsive daily encounters” (Fulcher 2004, p. 34). Relational Child and Youth Care practice enables family members to learn and rehearse new thoughts, feelings and actions in the most important arena of their lives, their daily life space(s) as it is happening (Maier, 1981). Relational Child & Youth Care practitioners are attuned to the voice of family members and bring their knowledge and experience to their encounter with these voices, with the intention of clearly meeting family members where they are at which also involves understanding how they got to where they are now.

In this chapter, we use the term Relational Child and Youth Care *practitioner* (Garfat & Fulcher, 2018) seeking to emphasize the plethora of job titles embraced by child and youth care practitioners world-wide (Gharabaghi, 2009; Phelan, 1999; 2009). Relational Child and Youth Care practitioners, supervisors, family workers, instructors, trainers, educators and researchers operate within and between the multiple daily life spaces where children, young people and family members live.

Relational Child and Youth Care Practice with Families

Relational Child and Youth Care practice focuses attention on what Garfat called ‘the in-between between us’ (2008; 2025a), or the ‘co-created space between us’ (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012; Peterson, 1988). Bellefeuille and Jamieson (2008) noted how “relational practice is a dynamic, rich, flexible, and continually evolving process of co-constructed inquiry ... [where] meaning emerges within the ‘space between’ the individual, family, or community” (p.38). This is a central feature of Relational Child and Youth Care practice. This co-created space, *the in-between between us*, (Garfat, 2008; 2025) represents the ‘hub of the wheel’ around which all other characteristics of practice revolve. This co-created in-between between us which we often call *the relationship* involves more than just ‘having a relationship’ with the other person(s). Rather, it invites us to consider the characteristics of this space itself (Garfat, 2008, 2025). As Gharabaghi (2014, p. 9) stated “relational practice shifts the focus from the actors engaged in some form of interaction to the experience of interacting regardless of the specific actors”. It means that the Relational Child and Youth Care practitioner is continuously attending to the co-created relationship dynamic that is unfolding in the in-between between us, wondering, for example, ‘*Is this a safe place?*’, ‘*Is this a learning space?*’ or ‘*Is this place of pain or oppression?*’ The focus is on what is unfolding in the co-created in-between, not just the individuals in the relationship. “The in-between between us is a co-created space of connection, intimacy and co-created reality” (Garfat, 2025a, para.9). The in-between between us is, indeed, the context for our interactions with families and family members. And thus, the practitioner is constantly asking “how is what I am doing or thinking of doing, likely to impact on the in-between us” (Garfat, 2025a, para.10).

This focus on the ‘co-created in-between between us’ ensures that a Relational Child and Youth Care practitioner remains attentive to the mutuality of relationship with and within the family, recognizing that all parties to the relationship with, and within, a family create and are influenced by it (Fewster, 1990). Stuart (2009, p. 222) argued that ‘*the relationship is the intervention*’ and this focus on the relational helps to ensure that a Relational Child and Youth Care practitioner maintains such a focus. Smith’s (2009) re-thinking of residential

Carrying the Conversation Forward

Kelly Shaw, Jenny McGrath and Thom Garfat

When we first envisioned this book, we hoped to contribute to an ongoing conversation about the place of families within Child and Youth Care practice. At its foundation is the belief that children and young people cannot be understood apart from the relationships, families, communities, and systems that shape their lives.

The contributing authors draw on diverse perspectives, experiences, and contexts to explore family work. Together, they remind us that meaningful Child and Youth Care practice is defined not only by what we do, but by how we engage with children, young people, and their families. Across these chapters, family work is presented as a way of practicing that requires thoughtful engagement, reflection, and partnership with families.

Perhaps one of the strongest messages presented in this collection is that family work affirms Child and Youth Care professional identity. Working with families extends beyond the acquisition of skills; it reflects a way of practicing that requires ethical responsibility, collaboration, and a commitment to understanding families within their unique lifespace. This professional growth is supported through supervision, mentorship, continued learning, and openness to new perspectives.

The chapters also acknowledge that family work is complex and shaped by the unique relationships, histories, strengths, and circumstances of each family. Practitioners often work within uncertainty, where there are no universal solutions or predetermined ways of engaging with families. Meaningful practice requires responsiveness to each family's circumstances and an understanding of the broader contexts that shape their lives. Within this complexity, Child and Youth Care continues to be grounded in the possibility of growth, connection, and change.

These chapters offer continued opportunities for reflection across practice, education, supervision, and professional learning. The collection does not provide a single approach to family work but invites ongoing consideration of how Child and Youth Care practitioners engage with families in ways that are thoughtful, responsive, and always grounded in relationship.

We are grateful to the contributors who shared their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives. In doing so, they have strengthened the ongoing conversation about working with family from a Child and Youth Care perspective and contributed to a deeper understanding of the relational practices that shape this work. As this conversation continues, may this collection support Child and Youth Care practitioners in their ongoing learning and growth as they walk alongside children, young people, families, and communities in their everyday lives.

Contributors

Laura Aguirre Polo is a Colombian-Canadian public health practitioner and researcher based in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. She leads Amal Unite & Empower, a workforce integration initiative that partners with newcomers, employers, community organizations, and government to reduce barriers to meaningful employment and strengthen workforce integration across the province.

Her work sits at the intersection of public health, immigration, workforce development, and economic inclusion, with a particular focus on translating research into practical, community-driven solutions. She collaborates across sectors to strengthen workforce integration, support employers, and improve opportunities for newcomers and the communities in which they live.

Laura is a PhD Candidate in Community Health at Memorial University. Her research examines how health policy, settlement experiences, and public systems shape newcomer wellbeing, health equity, and immigrant retention. Through her research and professional practice, she is committed to helping build stronger, more inclusive communities where newcomers can thrive.

Luke Carty, MA (CYC), BSc., CYC, has worked in the field of Child and Youth Care for over 15 years in a variety of settings. He began his career working in a residential program for male youth aged 12 to 18 years old in the Toronto area. Luke returned to school to complete his Advanced Diploma in Child and Youth Care from Humber College and was a member of the inaugural Masters of Child and Youth Care class at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) in 2017. He has worked as a part-time instructor in Child and Youth Care programs at Humber and Sheridan College. Luke currently works for Bartimaeus Inc., an Ontario-based organization providing Behavioural Support Services to a variety of settings across the province.

Kelly Cassano, MSc CYC; CYW, is a Children's Counsellor and Professor in the Child and Youth Care programs at Humber Polytechnic. With over 25 years of experience alongside children, youth, and families, and 18 years in post-secondary education, her work is deeply rooted in relationship, connection, and care. Her counselling practice is grounded in attachment-focused and relational approaches, with a strong belief in co-regulation and the importance of understanding lived experience. She provides counselling and parent support, working alongside caregivers as they strengthen relationships and navigate complexity. The families and students she works with continue to shape her compassionate and strengths-based approach.

Janice Daley has worked as a front-line Child and Youth Care practitioner since 2000. After 21 years serving with a community-based nonprofit organization in residential care and in-home family support, she transitioned her practice to a faith-based setting. Her work with grandparent-headed households inspired the focus of her MSc research. Janice is passionate about strengthening families through trauma-informed, relationship-based practice and integrating faith and professional care. She lives in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, with her husband, Peter.

Kristy Dellebuur O'Connor (she/her/hers) has a BA and MA in Child and Youth Care from the University of Victoria, and a PhD in Philosophy of Education from Simon Fraser University. Her doctoral research focused on the ethical responsibilities of settlers in disrupting coloniality in CYC education. She is a faculty member in CYC at Douglas College (Coquitlam, British Columbia), teaching theories of change, attachment theory, practicum, and individual and family practice courses. She also provides curriculum development and training to community agencies that support children, youth and their families.

Mardi Ennis, CYW, BA, MSc, has over twenty years of experience supporting children, adolescents, and families across clinical, community, and educational contexts. Her work reflects a solution-focused, relational approach to strengthening family systems. She is the Family Service Coordinator for Bartimaeus in Toronto and Peel, a Therapist at Life in Harmony Counselling Services, and a Partial Load Professor in the Child and Youth Care Program at Humber Polytechnic. Mardi holds an MSc in Child and Youth Care Studies from Strathclyde University, where her dissertation examined CYC in-home family support. She is also a frequent conference presenter and Past President of the Ontario Association of Child and Youth Care.

Andrea Furlong (she/her) has over 20 years of experience in child and youth care. She has worked in group care settings and has extensive experience in family support work, informed by anti-oppressive and strengths-based frameworks. Andrea holds bachelor's degrees in conflict resolution and social work, as well as a Master of Social Work. She is a certified Child and Youth Care Practitioner and a Registered Social Worker. As the Clinical Program Consultant at Waypoints (St. John's, NL), she provides guidance and support across programs while continuing direct work with families. She also maintains a community-based mental health counselling practice.

Asoni Grace holds a master's degree in social work (Public Health) from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) and is a trained social worker. She currently serves as the Senior Program Coordinator in the Advocacy, Research, and Training Department at Udayan Care. In this role, she contributes to initiatives that strengthen research, capacity building, and advocacy efforts aimed at supporting vulnerable communities. Her academic grounding and professional experience reflect her commitment to advancing social development.

Ashlyn Ganske is a Child and Youth Care (CYC) Practitioner based in Treaty 6 (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada). Ashlyn holds a bachelor's degree in CYC from MacEwan University and is near completion of a MSc in CYC from the University of Strathclyde. Ashlyn's graduate research explores sibling experiences of support living within a family of complex needs. Outside of her work, Ashlyn spends time with family and friends, does musical theatre, and likes visiting cute coffee shops. Ashlyn is grateful to her brother for all he has taught her, her parents for their steadfast support, and her husband, Sopulu for his endless love and encouragement.

Thom Garfat CM, PhD has worked with young people, families and those who work with them for 50 years. He holds a MA in Clinical Psychology and his PhD is in Child and Youth Care. Thom is the Co-founder and Editor of the *International Child and Youth Care Network* (www.cyc-net.org) and the journal *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*. Thom is also the developer of the training, *The Purposeful Use of Daily Life Events* which is used worldwide. He is the author or co-author of 7 books and numerous professional articles. His primary focus is on 'making it work'; finding practical everyday ways to enhance the process of healing and development for young people and families. He is a Member of the Order of Canada.

Leon Fulcher, MSW, PhD is a Retired Professor of Social Work with more than forty years of professional experience in the Child and Youth Care field – in North America and Europe, the Middle East and Africa, and the Asia-Pacific region – as a practitioner, manager, educator, researcher, and scholar. He chaired the Board of Governors for *The International Child and Youth Care Network* at www.cyc-net.org for a decade and continues as an Asia-Pacific representative. Recent publications with Tuhinul Islam include the *Residential Child and Youth Care in a Developing World* series, *Volumes 1-4*, with contributions from 71 countries (2016); (2017); (2018) and (2021).

Emmie Henderson-Dekort, PhD is an Assistant professor in the Child Studies and Social Work program at Mount Royal University, her research is focused on children's rights and participation. Her work centers on advancing meaningful inclusion of children and young people in research, policy, and practice contexts. She is particularly interested in relational and participatory approaches that position children and youth as active contributors to social change. Her scholarship draws on rights-based frameworks, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to inform ethical practice and strengthen child and youth engagement across diverse educational and community settings.

Virginia Hervey, MA, RSW, is a Senior Director at Hull Services in Calgary, Alberta, where she has led strategic initiatives in child and youth mental health for over a decade. With a background in Social Work and Child and Youth Care, she has a deep commitment to trauma-informed, anti-oppressive, and culturally responsive practices, Virginia integrates prevention and intervention strategies to support children, families, and communities. She is a respected mentor, collaborator, and advocate for including lived experience voices and Indigenous ways of knowing, and brings a systems-focused, community-oriented lens to her leadership and writing.

Gurneet Kaur Kalra, PhD is a trained Social Worker and is dedicated to both research and fieldwork. Presently, she serves as the Senior Manager of Research, Advocacy and Training at Udayan Care, an NGO focused on empowering vulnerable children, women, and youth. She oversees the facilitation of international collaborations for various field-based research projects and serves as an administrator for the international journal *Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond*. Dr. Kalra has authored numerous papers and chapters in national and international research journals and books and has presented at numerous national and international forums.

Jenny McGrath, PhD (she/her) is a certified Child and Youth Care (CYC) practitioner and Associate Professor in the CYC Department at MacEwan University in Alberta, Canada. Her work is grounded in a commitment to the profession, with interests in education, professional identity, family support, creative and arts-based interventions, relational practice, and the history of CYC. Drawing on more than 30 years in the field, Jenny brings curiosity and energy to her teaching, scholarship, and practice, and values fostering meaningful connections throughout the learning process.

Nicole L. Mizzi, BSW, RSW is a Child and Youth Care instructor at Bow Valley College in Calgary, Alberta, on Treaty 7 territory. Prior to entering academia, she worked for more than 15 years as a social worker with a youth criminal defence team, supporting and advocating alongside young people and families involved in the criminal justice system. She is currently completing a Master of Arts in Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. Her research and practice interests include reintegration, legal literacy, family engagement, and exploring how intersecting life experiences shape young people's pathways through the criminal justice system.

Kiran Modi, PhD founded Udayan Care, a non-profit organisation in India in 1994. She established several programs at national and international levels with a focus on family strengthening and care reform. Dr. Modi also pioneered the Biennial International Conference (BICON) and an international journal, *Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond* on family strengthening and alternative care. She has authored numerous papers and chapters in national and international research journals and books and has presented at numerous national and international forums.

Heather Modlin, PhD has worked in the field of Child and Youth Care for over 35 years. She is presently CEO of Amal Youth and Family Centre, a non-profit organization providing a range of services to children, youth, families and adults across Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. Heather has published numerous journal articles and book chapters and co-edited the books *Relational Child and Youth Care in Action*, *The Relational Thread: Mentoring in Child and Youth Care Practice*, and *Stories from the In-Between: Relational Practice Teaching Tales*. She has served on several national and international boards and is currently Chair of the Board of Governors of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net) and a board member of FICE Canada.

Heather has a PhD in Child and Youth Care from the University of Victoria. In 2017, Heather received the YWCA Woman of Distinction Award for Community and Social Development in Newfoundland and Labrador and in 2024 she was the recipient of the Unity Award.

Renee Piercey (she/her) is the Executive Director of Waypoints (St. John's, NL) and has more than 20 years of experience working with children, youth, and families. Her practice is grounded in relational, trauma-informed, and strengths-based approaches, with a particular interest in family support, youth in care, and organizational leadership. Renee is passionate about building services that strengthen families, foster resilience, and support positive outcomes for children and young people.

Jack Phelan was a CYC practitioner for over 50 years and truly enjoyed it. He wrote many chapters, articles and a few books on CYC practice and taught at MacEwan University in the CYC degree program.

Parker Pothier (they/them) works in Edmonton, Alberta as a Canadian Certified Counsellor. They are also an educator in the Child and Youth Care program at MacEwan University. Parker's areas of interest within their counselling practice include working with neurodivergent clients, those who are grieving, and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Parker works with many gender diverse children, teens, and their families. As an educator, Parker strives to connect with and inspire their students through play, relationships, and sharing lived experiences.

Leena Prasad is a trained lawyer based in Delhi, India. She has a passion for advocacy on human rights and child protection and is currently the Director of Udayan Care. She has co-authored numerous papers and chapters in national and international research journals and books and has presented at numerous national and international forums.

Christina Sackett, CPSS is the Hull's Voices Liaison at Hull Services, bringing professional expertise and lived experience as the caregiver of her son who faced mental health challenges. As a certified Peer Support Specialist, she builds trust and collaboration between families, youth, and service providers.

She chairs Hull's Voices, the Child, Youth, and Family Advisory Council, comprising former youth and family members who received Hull services. She also works with families and young people currently engaged in Hull's programs, ensuring their perspectives inform meaningful organizational change.

With extensive experience facilitating peer-led groups, educational sessions, and community initiatives, Christina champions person- and family-centred care, reduces power imbalances experienced by families, and strengthens partnerships across care teams.

She has also served on advisory councils, including Alberta Health Services' Child and Adolescent Addiction and Mental Health Family Advisory Council and the CMHA Alberta Rural Mental Health Project. Christina is committed to advancing compassionate, trauma-informed, recovery-oriented practices that recognize lived experience as expertise.

Kelly Shaw, PhD is a Child and Youth Care educator, Certified Child and Youth Care Practitioner, and registered counsellor with more than 30 years of experience working alongside children, youth, and families. She is a faculty member in the Child and Youth Care diploma program at Nova Scotia Community College and has worked across group care, community practice, family support, and post-secondary education.

Kelly's teaching, writing, and counselling are grounded in relational practice and informed by her interests in family-centred Child and Youth Care, decolonizing education, practitioner resilience, and reflective practice. She is committed to preparing practitioners who approach families with humility, curiosity, and hope.

Pennie Sibbald, MSc CYC, CCYCC, Adult Ed. has over 35 years of experience in Child and Youth Care. Pennie has dedicated her career to supporting children and families and fostering professional growth and excellence in the field. As a Coordinator for the Learning and Development Department at Hull Services in Calgary, Alberta, she and her team develop and deliver training and curriculum for direct care practitioners within Hull Services and across external partner organizations. In addition to her role at Hull Services, Pennie actively contributes to her profession as a member of the Board of the Child and Youth Care Association of Alberta and Chair of the Advanced Practice Committee, President of the Council of Canadian Child and Youth Care Associations, and Vice-President of FICE-Canada.

Rebecca Stiller, PhD (she/her) is an assistant professor in the Department of Child and Youth Care at MacEwan University and a dissertation supervisor and lecturer in the University of Strathclyde's MSc in Child and Youth Care. She began teaching full-time after almost a decade working with young people and families in direct practice, supervision, and senior leadership. Rebecca's teaching practice emphasizes relational, activity-oriented pedagogy and her research centers on adult and community education with a keen focus on social justice.

Zeni Thumbadoo, PhD is Deputy Director of the National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW) in South Africa and has over 40 years' experience in Child and Youth Care, social work, policy development, and child protection in South Africa. Her career has spanned direct practice, programme development, training, advocacy, and systems strengthening across the children's sector. She has played a leading role in the professionalisation of Child and Youth Care work in South Africa, contributing to training standards and statutory recognition for the profession. Dr. Thumbadoo led the development of the Isibindi model and serves on several national and international professional and editorial boards.

Jessica Williams (she/her/hers) has a BA in Criminology from Simon Fraser University, and MSW from the University of British Columbia. She is a faculty member in the CYC program at Douglas College, which is located on the unceded, traditional, and ancestral lands of the Coast Salish Peoples. Jessica teaches in the areas of child and youth mental health, relationship-building with young people, and advanced practice skills with both individuals and families. She is interested in pedagogical partnerships, creative approaches to research and writing, and storytelling in CYC practice.

This book is a welcome and timely addition to the literature in the field of child and youth care. The core of our work is about being in relationship and some of the most significant relationships we will ever have are with our families. No matter the road we travel or the places we go, our families are always with us. It is the same for the young people we work with. This book will encourage you to identify and reflect on your own beliefs and explore how you view and work with young people and their families. Our young people need us to recognize their family as a significant part of their past, present, and future.

Christine Gaitens, MSc. CYC-P, RSW
Child and Youth Care Practitioner

A timely and generous collection. Its premise is quietly transformative: that families belong at the centre of Child and Youth Care, and that relationship — the space between us — is where the work truly happens. Ranging from foundational theory to lived experience across Canada, India and South Africa, these chapters honour the complexity of family life without reaching for easy answers. They ask us to stay curious, to remain in relationship when times are hard, and to take children's rights and voices seriously. Accessible enough for students, rich enough for the experienced — this belongs on every CYC reading list.

Dr John Paul Fitzpatrick
Department of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Strathclyde

This book is a must-read for youth care workers who want to be sure to put family in the focus. Direct care staff will learn frameworks, read stories, and get real knowledge on how to best serve the youth they serve and the family unit in which they belong. Relational youth work and how it extends to the family is a concept all youth care staff need to know. The collection of authors in this book are experts who are paving the way for the field. A must-have book for my agency and staff.

Jody Rhodes, MS, CYC-P
Executive Director, Neu-Life Community Development, USA

