

# **Making Moments Meaningful in Child & Youth Care Practice**

**Second Edition**



**Editors**

**Thom Garfat, Leon Fulcher and John Digney**

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*Edited by*

Thom Garfat, Ph.D  
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# Making Moments Meaningful in Daily Life

Welcome to our book about making moments meaningful through the *Purposeful Use of Daily Life Events*©. Welcome to the old, the updated, the revised and the new. We say it like that because the use of daily life events has been around for a long time and is constantly being revisited or updated and new ideas emerge frequently – see, for example the revised version of the Characteristics of a Relational Child & Youth Care Approach (Chapter 2).

We believe that the purposeful use of daily life events, founded in a Child & Youth Care Approach can help to reduce the amount of time many young people, families or others have to live with the current pain in their lives.

The questions which underlay the *The Purposeful Use of Daily Life Events* are these:

- How do we make an everyday life event meaningful for a young person or other?
- How do we make what might otherwise be an ordinary or ‘fleeting’ moment into something meaningful in terms of reaching the goals we have established together to help reduce the pain in their lives?

- How do we ensure that our best efforts to make a single Moment or event, with this young person is as helpful, healing and purposefully meaningful as it can be?

Those are, in many ways, the ultimate questions for our work – whether we name ourselves as Child and Youth Care Worker, Youth Worker, Social Pedagogue, Social Care Worker or any one of our numerous different titles. If we want to be as effective as we can be and if we want to be as helpful as we can be in assisting a young person or other to move on to a place of less pain and trouble, then we need to wonder about how we can make the most of every moment we have with her or him. After all, the longer it takes, the longer they are in pain.

The articles in this book are intended to ‘deepen’ your knowledge in the areas of a Child and Youth Care Approach and the Purposeful Use of Daily Life Events. In many ways this book contains less than it could have because there is a wealth of information available to us on the importance and relevance of using daily life events. Much additional information can be found at the International Child and Youth Care Network (<https://www.cyc-net.org>) from where some of the materials in this book have been drawn.

We encourage you to go there and explore even deeper this aspect of helping troubled young people and their families.

So take your time, read, enjoy and make this reading time a meaningful moment for yourself. After all, meaningful moments are as important for us as for anyone.

**Thom, John and Leon**

2019

# 1

## **The Meaningful Use of Everyday Life Events in Child & Youth Care (Revised)**

**Thom Garfat**

**I**t seems unclear when the expression “the use of everyday life events” first entered the child and youth care literature. Probably, like many things in our field, it slipped in silently like a kid unsure if she belonged. Yet this expression succeeded in capturing the heart of child and youth. Indeed, it has come to be the most defining characteristic of what we call a Child and Youth Care approach (see chapter 2 of this book). Similar expressions have appeared from time to time, as others have expressed the idea that child and youth care involves, as Fritz Redl (1959) said, ‘exploiting’ the events that occur during the daily life of a child in care, for the benefit of that child (Fox, 1995). Redl’s expression was not readily incorporated into the field, probably because of the political associations attached to the word ‘exploiting’. Redl, of course, was talking about taking advantage of events, as they occur in the life space of the child. While the words may not have caught on, the idea certainly did. Just as the definition of child and youth care has come to include ‘the relational’ (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2008; Garfat & Fulcher, 2012) and the meaning of ‘life-space’ has changed



(Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2013) so has the meaning of the phrase 'daily life events'. Whereas it used to refer primarily to what we might call the routines and rituals of everyday life (meals, bedtimes, etc.), it has come to refer to all the moments which occur in the life-space. This 'idea' has been evolving over time.

Maier (1987) encouraged us to attend to and use 'the minutiae' of everyday life, the little things, the small, seemingly unimportant events out of which the days of our lives are constructed: things like waiting for meal-times, occasions of leave-taking, or just simply coming into contact with one another. Followers of Redl suggest the use of life space interviews in which the care worker takes advantage of a singular event or moment (such as an argument between two youth) as it is occurring or immediately after it occurs, specifically entering into the immediate life of the child (Brendtro & Long, 2002). Peterson (1988) suggested watching for naturally occurring therapeutic opportunities that present themselves in the course of daily living. Guttman (1991) suggested that care workers must enter into the flow of immediacies of the child's experiencing. In this way they can use interventions which are congruent with the flow of that experiencing (Fulcher, 1991). Entering into this flow of experiencing as it is occurring, and helping the child to live differently in the context within which they find themselves (Fewster, 1990), is central to impactful child and youth care practice. This focus on what we might call joint experiencing between child and worker, and the facilitation of the opportunity for change within this joint experiencing highlights the commonly identified CYC characteristic of 'doing with'. In many ways, it is what distinguishes our work from the interventive efforts of other professionals. In impactful child and youth care practice, the worker becomes, with the child, the co-creator of a therapeutic context (Durrant, 1993; Maier, 1994; Peterson, 1988) within which the child might experience the opportunity for change. This focus on the joint experiencing of what Garfat (2008) called the in-between between us is the essence of contemporary, relational Child and Youth Care Practice (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012) for it is through the everyday moments and opportunities that we might find the pathway to the creation of the truly relational experience. Recent

writings have demonstrated the use of daily life events in education, training, supervision, family work community and many other areas. Further, as Gharabaghi (2013) suggests, we are even finding ways to be present in the everyday moments of peoples' lives when we are not 'physically there'. Building on our powerful history, we are finding ways to make all moments meaningful.

## **Requirements**

Child and youth care practice has evolved over time, and the expression 'the use of daily life events' might be rephrased as 'the entering into, and purposeful use of, daily life events, as they are occurring, for the benefit of the child, youth or family'. Such practice involves numerous skills, knowledge and ability on the part of child and youth care workers. They must, for example,

- have knowledge of child development (Maier, 1987),
- understand how to access and use that knowledge (Eisikovits, Beker, & Guttman, 1991),
- know about the process of change (Garfat, Fulcher & Digney, 2019),
- possess an active self-awareness which allows the worker to distinguish self from other (Garfat, 1994; Ricks, 1989),
- be able to enter into an intimate caring relationship (Austin & Halpin, 1987, 1989) that involves attachment (Maier, 1993) and belonging (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 2002),
- understand the process of meaning-making (Bruner, 1990; Krueger, 1994; VanderVen, 1992),
- have a framework for organizing their interventive actions (Eisikovits, Beker, & Guttman, 1991; Garfat & Newcomen, 1992),
- understand the meaning and dynamics of relational practice (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012). understand how relationships create the life-space (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2013),
- understand and be able to live the characteristics of Relational Child & Youth Care Practice (this book, Chapter 2)

All of this is necessary for recognising, using or even creating opportunities in the daily life events of a child, youth or family's life. The use of daily life events as they are occurring is one of the foundational characteristics that distinguish child and youth care practice from other forms of helping — which may also use daily life events, but at a distance removed from the immediacy of the experience itself.

The child and youth care focus on making everyday moments meaningful and therapeutic has been one of the most profound evolutions of our field and the more we focus on making moments meaningful in this way, the more helpful we will be to the young people and families with whom we work.

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# 2

## Characteristics of a Relational Child and Youth Care Approach (Revisited)

Thom Garfat, James Freeman, Kiaras Gharabaghi and Leon Fulcher

### Introduction

#### A Brief History of the Characteristics

In 2004, Garfat (2004a) identified characteristics, drawn from research, classic and contemporary literature and his and others' experience of the field, which were thought to identify a Child and Youth Care (CYC) approach to caring. These characteristics were updated by Fulcher and Garfat (2008) when writing about their applicability in foster care and then again in a review of applications of a relational Child and Youth Care approach in a special issue of the *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* journal (2011). These applications were further developed in *Making Moments Meaningful in CYC Practice* (Garfat, Fulcher & Digney, 2013), in *Child and Youth Care in Practice* (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012), and in *Child and Youth Care Practice with Families* (Fulcher & Garfat, 2015). Subsequent writings expressed how the characteristics were applicable to specific practices of supervision (Charles, Freeman & Garfat, 2016) and trauma responsive care (Freeman, 2015a). These characteristics are again updated and presented here based on readings, workshops,

conferences, discussions and insights drawn from the field in the past few years.

### **About this Revision**

This updated version of the 25 characteristics represents a significant enhancement from previous versions. It acknowledges and includes many significant voices that are important to the field. It also acknowledges that the field of Child and Youth Care has, over a period of decades, been complacent in its approach to centering the lived experiences of Indigenous, racialized, non-binary gendered, neuro-diverse bodies, presenting instead a list of characteristics that can be read as fundamentally 'white', ablelist, and heteronormative (Gharabaghi, 2016; Vachon, 2018, Skott-Myhre, 2017). We have also learned a lot about the effects of trauma on young people, including generational trauma as well as abuse and neglect.

This new version of the 25 characteristics is not a critique of previous versions; it is instead a way of re-contextualizing the characteristics within lived experiences and intersectionalities in an effort to provide a foundation (albeit one in need of constant growth and adaptation) for Child and Youth Care practice moving forward. Collectively, we set out to reimagine the 25 characteristics by engaging over 100 Child and Youth Care involved people (broadly defined) from North America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Australia and Europe in order to open dialogue among differently located and positioned individuals to reflect on the characteristics and provide suggestions for rendering these commensurate with the many different ways people are connected to the field. Through this process, the 25 characteristics were reviewed by individuals with longstanding involvement in the field and its community, as well as by many individuals thinking and writing from perspectives and with identities reflecting various contexts including trauma, multiple racial, gender, ability/disability, sexual orientation, and class positions.

In reflecting on the feedback we received, we must first express how grateful we are that so many individuals provided detailed,

serious, meaningful suggestions for shifting the nuances and the scope of the 25 characteristics to such an inclusive and relevant space. We are especially grateful for the feedback from individuals who have long encountered barriers, sometimes invisible to us, in attempting to access this field and the community that comes with it. We are equally grateful for the expression of relevance and meaning that these characteristics have in such diverse geographies, experiences and cultural spaces. We heard about how these characteristics have been helpful in Isibindi projects in South Africa, in residential settings across Canada, in post-secondary education settings in Europe, North America and Africa, and in community-based child and youth care services in Australia and Asia. We learned that the field, broadly defined, is fundamentally interested in continuing discussions and exploration of the following themes:

- The role of power embedded in racist ideologies, state and institutional structures, and cultural hegemonies;
- A critical perspective on the universality of core concepts, including care, love and relational practice;
- The importance of historical events and practices and their connection to generational and on-going trauma;
- Acknowledging, especially in Canada, the United States and Australia, Indigenous ways of knowing, experiencing, and sharing;
- Framing Child and Youth Care practice as an approach rather than a rigidly defined professional practice with impenetrable borders for individuals and groups of people with different lived experiences based on race, gender, ability/disability and other criteria.

We also learned about, and are pleased to express our commitment to, the need for on-going reflection on, and revision of, these 25 characteristics, always with the voices of diverse individuals and groups as

partners. In many respects, we (the authors) do not own these characteristics. They belong to our diverse field and the people who are drawing on these characteristics as a way of being in the world.

### **Defining a Relational Child and Youth Care Approach**

We believe that Child and Youth Care practitioners are ideally situated to be among the most influential of healers and helpers in a person or family's life. For many years, the work that Child and Youth Care practitioners do was considered, at best, a sub-profession and the workers themselves were frequently considered to be extensions of other helping professionals, most commonly Social Workers (Garfat & Charles, 2010). However, with the passage of time and the evolution of a distinct approach to practice, Child and Youth Care (CYC)<sup>1</sup> and CYC practitioners, like social pedagogues in Europe and child care workers in South Africa, have come to be recognized as possessing a specific expertise and a unique approach to working with children, youth and families (Fulcher & Garfat, 2015; Mann-Feder, Scott, & Hardy, 2017; Thumbadoo, 2008) involving a "comprehensive framework for being with young people in relational and authentic ways" (Gharabaghi, 2017a, p. 5).

A CYC practitioner's position in the daily life of another person, and/or their family and community, allows the practitioner to intervene proactively, responsively and immediately to assist others to develop different ways of acting and experiencing in the world (Fulcher & Garfat, 2008). There is no other form of helping which is so immediate, so grounded in the present experiencing or, one might say, so everyday. This immediacy of being present as helpers creates in-the-moment learning opportunities (Ward, 1998) allowing the individual to experiment with alternative ways of acting and experiencing as they are living their lives. CYC practice is not oriented around temporally spaced and infrequent visits to an

1 The term Child and Youth Care (CYC) is used here in both the specific and generic sense. While it does refer to those practitioners in a variety of countries who carry the title of CYC worker, it also refers to those who might practice within a Child and Youth Care framework but be identified with different titles such as youth worker, social pedagogue, residential social worker, and across multiple settings.



office where the 'client' meets with a therapist who has little to no experience of the individual's experiences in everyday life. Rather, it is based on being in-the-moment with the individual(s), experiencing their life and living with it them as it unfolds (Baizerman, 1999; Winfield, 2008), within an inclusive, rights-based, anti-oppressive and trauma-informed framework that extends from the nature of inter-personal relations to the engagement of systemic and institutional features of injustice (Daniel, 2016). Child and youth care practice seeks to avoid the pitfalls of being with others as framed eloquently by Hooks (2000): "When we face pain in relationships, our first response is to sever bonds rather than to maintain commitment." We remember, always, that young people are the authors of their own story (history) and, ultimately, the agents of their own change (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2011).

Child and Youth Care practice is based on helping people think about and live their life differently, as they are living it (Freeman, 2015b; Garfat, 2002). It is a focused, timely, practical and, above all, immediately responsive form of caring which uses "applied learning and daily uses of knowledge to inform more responsive daily encounters with children or young people" (Fulcher 2004, p. 34). It is immediate and focused on the moment as it is occurring. It allows for the individual to learn, experience and practice different thoughts, feelings and actions in the most important area of their lives – daily life as they are living it (Gannon, 2014; Mucina, 2012).

We recognize that becoming involved in a person's or family's life is more than an inter-personal process; it requires an engagement with the context of history and its consequences, including, for example, the histories of residential schools and deeply embedded biases impacting Indigenous communities across North America, as well as anti-Black racism, gender normativity, sexual conservatism, neuro-diversity and other histories of oppression and racism around the world. Still we believe that Child and Youth Care practitioners are ideally situated to impact the circumstances of young people, their families and their communities precisely because CYC practice offers a unique way of being in the world, and therefore of being with young people, their families, and their communities in the context of their present situation.

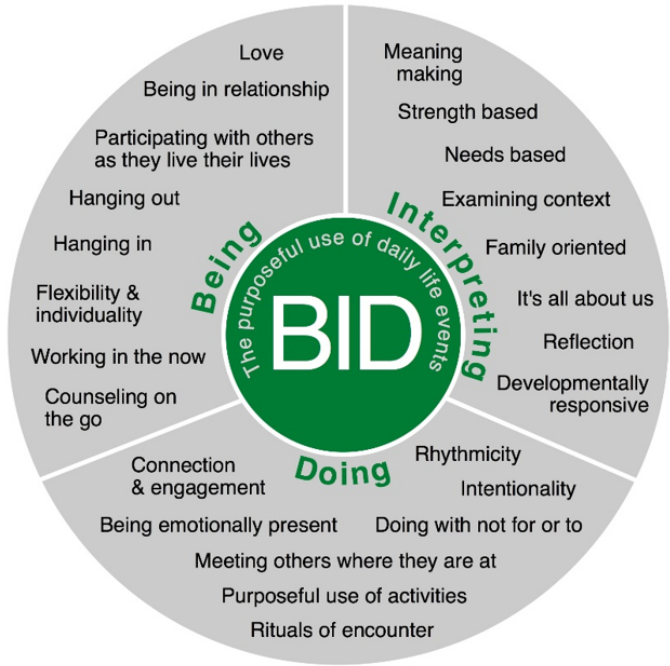
## **The Characteristics as a Framework for Practice**

The diagram below (Freeman & Garfat, 2014) shows how these characteristics of a Child and Youth Care approach are arranged around the purposeful use of daily life events and grouped according to processes of Being, Interpreting and Doing (Freeman & Garfat, 2014). These characteristics are foundational to our way of being, interpreting and doing in our work, wherever our work is located. They characterize the Child and Youth Care way of being in the world with other(s).

This approach outlined by these characteristics aims for inclusiveness, an equitable joining together of all who participate in the field. Thus, one might be, for example, a Child and Youth Care worker, a CYC instructor, a family worker, a trainer, a youth advocate, a community development worker, a researcher, a supervisor, etc. What binds them together, as CYC practitioners, is the shared approach to their work. Thus, CYC practitioners are connected by how they think about and carry out their work. Child and Youth Care is, after all, an 'approach' or a way of being in the world with others. So, we aim here to be inclusive while acknowledging the historic context of trauma, power, and 'privilege and cultural singularity' (Gharabaghi, 2017b) which is the history of our field. Indeed, as Skott-Myhre said, all of us "need to seek to be accountable to our privilege in real and material ways" (2017, p. 17) and recognize the political aspects of our work.

The 25 characteristics of relational Child and Youth Care Practice are not intended to capture, for example, the limiting world of institutional care and traditional designations within the professional field of Child and Youth Care. They are, quite to the contrary, meant to reflect a particular approach to 'being with', whether this is framed around euro-centric ideas of developmental growth or, for example, Indigenous ideas about the 'Healing Path' (McCabe, 2007). Ultimately, the Characteristics are about child and youth care practice in the life-space and in the moment. They do not represent an analysis of social systems, institutions or processes. They make no attempt to comprehensively capture the richness of literature that speaks to anti-oppressive practices, marginalization, system change and advocacy. And they are

certainly not meant to provide a foundation for policy frameworks. The characteristics speak to how we are with young people, in all of their diversity and life experiences, understanding that people’s lives are very much impacted by social structures, power relations, racism, exclusion, marginalization and other dynamics.



**Characteristics of a Relational Child and Youth Care Approach**

Freeman, J. & Garfat, T. (2014). Being, interpreting, doing: A framework for organizing the characteristics of a relational child and youth care approach. *Child & Youth Care Online*, 179, 23-27. Retrieved from <http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/jan2014.pdf>

**Relational Child and Youth Care Practice**

*Relational* Child and Youth Care practice is an approach in which attention is directed towards ‘the in-between between us’ (Garfat, 2008). As Bellefeuille and Jamieson noted “relational practice is a dynamic, rich, flexible, and continually evolving process of co-constructed inquiry. In this type of inquiry, meaning emerges



**Thom Garfat, PhD** is an international consultant and trainer who, for over forty years, has worked with children, young people, care givers and those who help them.

His primary focus is on 'making it work'; finding practical day to day ways to enhance the process of development and healing for young people and families.



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