



The Relational Thread

Mentoring in Child & Youth Care Practice

Editors

Dr. John M. Digney and Dr. Heather Modlin

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Reflections from the Field

This book addresses mentoring by bringing together a collection of lived experiences from a stellar band of leaders in the field of Child and Youth Care Practice. It explores the art, practice and impact of mentoring, shows how the "minutia of daily life" interactions can be more impactful than formal approaches, and how mentoring relationships often evolve from informal connections into lasting professional and personal bonds. As I read the passages, I reflected on my own growth and the relationships that shaped me, and my heart was warmed by the power of genuine human connection.

Mark Strother

Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Cal Farley's, USA

This publication highlights the reciprocal nature of mentorship, emphasising its transformative power and everlasting influence on individuals' personal and professional growth. The Editors inputs captivate from the outset and serve as a poignant reminder of the meaningful connections that shape our lives, encouraging introspection and appreciation for the supportive relationships that define our paths in life. Through diverse anecdotes of mentors and mentees, the book emphasises key themes such as reciprocity, compassion, and curiosity, highlighting the essence of relational learning. It illustrates the universal human experience of seeking belonging and connection, mirroring the foundational principles of those who choose to work in Children, Youth and Family services. The book will be a valuable resource to all those who work with people in human services and leadership development and inspires a growth mindset.

Rosarii Mannion

National Director People and Change, Tusla, Ireland

The authors and contributors bring an unprecedented wealth of history and experiences in our field with the unbreakable common thread being the immense value of relationships. Their insistence that relational practice is a best practice is in line with what youth and families tell us is most likely to positively impact their journeys. Thank you for the global compilation of wisdom.

Kari Sisson

Executive Director, ACRC, USA

I wonder how often we as practitioners reflect on the meaningful moments we have experienced on this so called “river of life” that we are on. I wonder how much we pay particular attention to reflecting on those who we have encountered along the way and those with who we have held nurturing relationships which were teaching and enabling, facilitating us to develop the craft of relational child and youth care practice. Woven through this book are narratives and themes that speak directly to many, if not all of the fundamental principles of relational practice. Those moments of serendipitous connection and sliding doors, of normalising experience, an oasis of calm in the storm of complexity that can vary on a day by day basis.

Shane Murdoch

Director, TransformOutcomes, New Zealand

This is a thoughtful read that highlights the strong parallels between mentoring and child and youth care practice. Through diverse stories of mentors and mentees, common themes of reciprocity, generosity and curiosity emerge, reminding us of the power of relational learning, which is at the core of our field. The exploration of these mentoring relationships also reveals something universal - the human experience itself, and our need and desire for belonging, understanding and connection, which again are central to Child and Youth Care. This book encouraged me to reflect on my own journey and experience in mentorship; both as a practitioner and as a senior leader considering how

to strengthen mentoring within my own organization. A relatable and inspiring book that offers both learning and reflection for anyone in Child and Youth Care.

Renee Piercey

Executive Director, Waypoints Inc.

St Johns, Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the book and reminiscing about the old times. You've done a great job capturing this area of work. In addition to inspiring and encouraging stories about mentoring, we learn what it is and what it isn't, how it usually develops organically rather than in a planned way, and how it is a gift that keeps on giving, helping equip the next generation of child and youth care workers. We learn directly from many luminaries in our field today, how their gifts were tailored in the context of vital mentoring relationships.

Simon Walsh

CEO, Allambi Care, New South Wales, Australia

It is with mixed emotions that I offer this testimonial, regretting that I didn't manage to complete the chapter I had said I would write, but mostly gratitude to the editors for managing to pull this project off! It is an important book. John and Heather, in the Preface, note "an obligation on us all to make sure that our professional and relational history is not 'disappeared' in front of our own eyes, because this tells us about where we came from and how we evolved." They have gone some way to ensuring that our history doesn't disappear. Rather, it is enriched by this volume. My own current writing project draws on the work of the Scottish American philosopher, Alistair MacIntyre, who died earlier this year. MacIntyre's work, it strikes me, demonstrates why this book is so significant. He identifies the importance of everyday practices that are sustained by tradition and moral purpose. In our late modern world, we can be encouraged to believe that we have all the answers, yet much of what I see in contemporary CYC is shallow and fragile. We need tradition

– we stand on the shoulders of giants. Many of those giants, along with their ideas, grace these pages. They tell the story of where we have come from and why that is important. They lay down solid foundations for the field.

Mark Smith

*Professor of Social Work, School of Humanities, Social Sciences and Law,
Division of Education and Society, University of Dundee, Scotland*

There is tremendous complexity unpacked in this book as it explores the multi-faceted experience of mentoring. The intricacies of the stories in this text can come across as a little overwhelming, with so much to decode in each chapter. Some chapters speak broadly about the characteristics of mentoring, while others list specific traits. This book does not set out to clearly define the concept of mentoring, but to demonstrate that mentoring may first be a feeling experienced by the mentee, and that mentorship follows as the process. It was fascinating to read about the deep intimacies woven throughout the relationships in these chapters. Many of the relationships described felt not only helpful but, in some cases, therapeutic (though not in the clinical sense).

The experiences of mentoring described in this book are interactional, relational, and shared. The three key themes about effective mentoring relationships that stood out to me are:

- Being mentored can help us establish a strong professional identity more quickly and with less harm as we inevitably learn to become effective in our work.
- The most meaningful mentoring relationships develop organically, as assigned mentorships often feel less relational.
- The most powerful mentoring relationships involve both people loving who they are, whilst in that space together.

Ernie Hilton

Executive Director, HomeBridge Youth Society, Nova Scotia, Canada

Reading this book was a moving experience for me, especially because I know many of the practitioner-mentor pairs whose voices are woven through these chapters. The conversations are honest and real, capturing the questions, struggles, and discoveries that shape us in this work. What stood out most was how the learning flowed in both directions. Mentorship isn't about one person holding the answers – we all grow through relationship, and this back-and-forth changes everyone involved. These stories serve as a record of our field, preserving the lived experiences and reflective moments that too often pass quietly between us. It reminds us that Child and Youth Care has always been about relationship at its core, and that through those connections we keep learning, again and again about who we are and how we grow together in this practice.

Joanne Fraser

CYC Faculty, Nova Scotia Community College, Nova Scotia, Canada

Foreword

In 2012 I had the career changing experience of attending a meeting of amazing minds from around the world at the first Child and Youth Care (CYC) Clan Gathering in Scotland. The purpose of this gathering was to bring together individuals from across the globe who were invested in making the lives of children better and ensuring children in care had the best chances in life. The mission was that we must learn from each other to help build stronger systems, organizations, and people. I still have the signed Scottish flag from that gathering. It was there that I met people who would not only change my view on the care of children but help me grow as a leader and person. I can fondly look back on this as where I first met Dr. John Digney and Dr. Heather Modlin, both of whom I consider not only amazing colleagues but dear friends.

Those who have the pleasure of knowing John and Heather personally have been witness to the powerful contributions they continue to make to the CYC field. They have decades of experience in honing their skills and helping others do the same. They are passionate advocates for relational care, and the power that even the smallest interactions could mean to a young person. This makes them uniquely poised to edit a book that highlights the power of mentorship in our field. Heather and John have walked that walk from the very beginning and embraced what mentorship means. They are scholars and practitioners, but what beats at the heart of both is being a CYC worker.

In an ever-changing world, that is fast paced and often screen facing, we don't always stop and think about the relationships that make us who we are. Many don't think about those persons, sometimes quiet, sometimes loud, who helped us along our journey. The title of this book, "The Relational Thread" truly speaks to power of connectedness. This connectedness is not only vital to our well-being but to how we use that connectedness to help others. This book is written for not only those who are new to the work, but for those who have moved into supervisory capacities, or those of us who are in the "seasoned" category. It is a book that can be enjoyed by all, and it will no doubt make you reflect.

As I read this book, I found myself stopping after every chapter and reflecting on my three decades long career. So many people invested in me and gave me guidance along the way. So many pioneers (many in this book) took moments to share a kind word, a tough word sometimes when I needed to hear it and offered the wisdom that I needed in that moment. That has been the power of mentorship in my life. We don't just all get out of bed and become the people who we are. We are shaped by experiences and relationships along our journey. This book made me pause and truly remember those names, those moments and those experiences that have taken me from being a CYC worker, to Professor, to CEO, but most importantly a mentor to others.

In these chapters, you will meet authors who are brilliant but humble. Each share so much of themselves and the powerful stories of connection. It is a peek behind the curtain of those in our field who truly have invested their lives to CYC practice. Each chapter is unique and has its own voice. I think you, as the reader, will find yourself smiling at the dialogue found in each. It is almost as if you are sitting in the room with them as they speak. It is heartfelt and humble. You can feel the power that these mentoring relationships have had on the editors and authors. You will find that true mentorship isn't a one-way street, it is reciprocal. That it is not transactional, but relational. You will find that it can span months to a lifetime. But above all, it is life changing.

I have no doubt that this book will leave you reflecting about your own journey, whether you are at the beginning or coming to the end of a career. I encourage you to not only read these pages but to allow yourself time to reflect after each chapter. I think you will find, as I did, that the thread that weaves our work is incredibly strong and ever growing.

Okpara Rice

CEO, Tanager Place, Iowa, USA

Adjunct Professor, University of Iowa School of Social Work

Board Member, CYC-Net

Preface

*Without reflection, we go blindly on our way,
creating more unintended consequences,
and failing to achieve anything useful.*

Margaret J. Wheatley

We reach a point in our lives (perhaps several points) where we reflect on how we have arrived here and what and who have helped shape the people that we have become. This point was reached by one of the editors last year, leading to the conclusion that there were many actors throughout the journey who had a part to play. We are all a product of our experiences and the encounters we have along the way, yet it is often the case that those who have influenced us are never aware of the impact they have had.

This book emerged from a series of conversations between the editors about the many, often shared people who have left their mark on us, both personally and professionally. Did these people have formal roles in our lives? Not always – yet from time to time there had been some type of a structured relationship. Very quickly we each identified dozens of people who we described as mentors, influencers, advisors, and guides. Then we realised that they themselves would have had similar mentors, influencers, advisors, and guides.

Having had the privilege of spending time with some of our “mentors” and other paragons of our field, we have been lucky to hear many of their stories, such as the early relationship between Lorraine Fox and the folks at the Carl Rogers Institute, the connection and mentoring that occurred between Thom Garfat and Henry Maier and the relationship that evolved between Howard Bath and Larry Brendtro.

But we are acutely aware that we don’t know all the stories that connect us, and many of the younger generations have limited or no awareness of the stories that we know and how they have influenced the genesis and evolution of professions involved in serving children, youth and families.

*People who think they know everything are
a great annoyance to those of us who do.*
Isaac Asimov

As the world becomes more complex, and in many ways unrecognisable from the one we experienced during the latter part of the twentieth century, it becomes clear that there is an obligation on us all to make sure that our professional and relational history doesn't "disappear" in front of our own eyes. After all, it is our history that informs us about where we came from and how we have evolved. These are lessons which should not be forgotten. This was the main impetus for this book.

"Wouldn't it be cool to ask some of our close colleagues to identify someone that has heavily influenced their practice and ask them to write together with this person or persons about their mentoring relationships and the wisdoms that have been passed along during their collective journeys?"

It occurred to us that this type of project could serve many purposes. It could:

- Create an opportunity to gather and share stories of connection and mentoring.
- Let the people who we have learned from realise the positive impact they have had on our professional development.
- Open the possibility of exploring the many iterations of what we consider "mentoring," and how this looks in practice.
- Help us explore the themes that emerge from the many different perspectives of our contributors.

At the same time, we realised that it could be a complex and fraught undertaking. There were so many variables, so many considerations, so many people and voices to try to include that we could never get all of those voices into this book.

And so, we made our individual lists and after comparing them we approached thirty individuals who we consider to be peers (people in practice for a significant number of years, who have been involved in contributing to the body of knowledge of child and youth care, and

specifically relational practice) to explain our idea and ask if they would like to contribute.

The best teacher is not the one who knows most but the one who is most capable of reducing knowledge to that simple compound of the obvious and wonderful.

H.L. Mencken

The brief given to contributors was to identify someone who they viewed as a mentor (using the term loosely), approach them with a view to co-writing a chapter concentrating on the key learning they took from this person, as well as the concepts of mentoring from their own perspective. The application of this brief was individual and diverse, and each chapter follows a different route. We get to hear stories from “way back when,” seeing into some worlds that we might never have considered before, and we get to share in the thinking of others.

Mentoring is also about connections. Here we are, John and Heather, from Ireland and Canada, sitting in a little house in a remote location in Northern Ireland, co-editing a book on mentoring with contributors from Canada, the United States, Ireland, Scotland, New Zealand, Australia, Bangladesh, and South Africa. How did that happen? The easy answer would be through our shared connections. But that would only be a part of the story. In reality, “Relational Seeds” were planted by our shared mentor’s “meddling” – and these seeds grew (and continue to grow) into webs of interconnectedness with likeminded individuals, committed to quality care for children and youth, across countries and cultures. This “relational contagion” of shared experiences and influences is evident throughout the chapters in this book.

In mentoring, influencing, and in helping colleagues to grow and flourish, we must take on the role (as Robert Frost tells us) not of teacher, but of *an awakener*.

John and Heather

Fermanagh, July 2025

Acknowledgements

First, our deepest thanks to Martin and Michelle, who generously provided us with the perfect editing location, complete with strong Wi-Fi, and a suspiciously comfortable couch. Without your calm oasis of productivity (and coffee), this book might still be a Word document titled *"Final_FINAL_2_ReallyThisTime.docx."*

To all our contributors, thank you for lending your brilliance, time, and ability to meet deadlines with only mild threats. Each chapter sparkles because of your insight, creativity, and willingness to dive headfirst into the chaos.

To our families, who tolerated the long nights, the muttering, the paper avalanche, and the "I can't talk right now, I'm in the middle of a sentence that started yesterday," thank you for the endless support, the occasional meals shoved under doors, and pretending to understand our random rants about semicolons.

A huge shout-out to all our mentors – past, present, and sometimes imaginary – who taught us how to write, edit, rewrite, scream into a pillow, rewrite again, and eventually call it "done." You shaped our voices, sharpened our thinking, and helped us believe this whole "author" thing was not just a caffeine-fuelled hallucination.

And finally, to the reader: if you've made it this far into the acknowledgements, congratulations! You're either very thorough, bored, or just procrastinating. Either way, we salute you.

Introduction

At its most basic level, mentoring is active. It requires connection, initiative, action, and it can involve risk taking. In the examples throughout this book, a mentoring relationship was established because the “mentee” put themselves out there (read the literature from the field, went to a conference, joined a professional association, furthered their education) and, in doing so, either attracted the attention of more experienced or influential individuals or approached them directly (because through their own reading, research and immersion in the field they knew who to approach). As the content of the book came into sharper focus, it became apparent that the type of mentoring prevalent in our work with children and families, across all domains (including the academic/education of new workers, front line practice, in supervision and management and even at a therapeutic level), was more than the traditional type of mentoring that exists or is delivered in other professions. What we began to see were explicit examples of what can be called Relational Mentoring.

Traditional Mentoring

The word “mentoring” is generally used to describe some form of professional development process where an experienced individual (mentor) guides and supports a less experienced individual (mentee) to help them develop their skills to hopefully achieve their goals. It's a collaborative relationship focused on career and personal growth. Key aspects of mentoring include:

- **Guidance and Support** – where the mentor provides advice, support, and encouragement to help mentees navigate their professional pathway.
- **Skill Development** – where there is a focus on helping mentees develop specific skills, competencies, and knowledge.

- **Knowledge Transfer** – where the mentors share their experience and expertise with mentees, including offering subjective insights and advice.
- **Role Modelling** – where mentors demonstrate desired behaviors, work ethic, and values in action.

Some of the benefits of mentoring can include:

- Career advancement;
- Skill enhancement;
- Increased confidence;
- Networking opportunities;
- Improved performance.

Relational Mentoring

Relational mentoring is different to traditional mentoring as it emphasizes the quality and nature of the relationship between mentor and mentee as the core of the mentoring process, focusing on mutual growth, learning, and development. It moves beyond the more “transactional exchange” that occurs within traditional mentoring to foster a deeper connection between mentor and mentee, ultimately benefitting both mentor and mentee. In other words, **traditional mentoring** usually focuses on achieving specific, pre-determined goals, with the mentor primarily guiding the mentee toward those goals, whereas **relational mentoring** emphasizes the relationship itself as the primary focus, with the mentee's individual growth and development being the main objective. Some of the key aspects of Relational Mentoring can include:

- **Mutual Growth** – Relational mentoring is a two-way path where both individuals learn and grow.
- **Interdependence** – Both mentor and mentee learn to “lean into,” and rely on each other for support, guidance, and learning experiences.
- **Generative Relationship** – like all good relationships, relational mentoring evolves, and grows in ways that are mutually advantageous.

- **A Focus on Connection** – building a strong, trusting relationship as the foundation for effective growth, guidance and support.

Some of the additional benefits of Relational Mentoring include:

- Increased motivation and engagement.
- Enhanced personal and professional development.
- Improved communication and collaboration.
- Greater career satisfaction and success.
- Improved retention rates within an organisation.

In the stories of how relationships began and evolved, it is clear that some of the concepts that need to be present for us to be willing and able to connect and learn from potential mentors and influencers include:

- Trust.
- Mutual Respect.
- Integrity.
- Honesty.
- Unconditionality.
- Being Reciprocal.
- Shared Understanding.
- Empathy.
- Authenticity.

How interesting it is then that these are the same types of concepts that have shown up in recent research on Relational Practice with children, youth and families? That shouldn't be a surprise.

For mentoring to be useful, it requires courage, and a willingness to grow, to stretch, to be in discomfort and confusion, and to suspend pre-existing beliefs in the service of new knowledge acquisition and enhanced experiencing of self. This is true for both parties in a mentoring relationship. The process of learning about yourself, particularly within a child and youth care context, is messy and painful. Yet, within the context of a relationship in which the "Other" is fully invested in you as an evolving person, this pain is buffered. It is also necessary. How do we help young

people and families to grow, through relational engagement, if we have not experienced it ourselves?

As you read through this volume, you will be introduced to some of the amazing people who we are privileged to call our friends and our mentors. Their stories form part of the historical fabric of our professions.

1. The More We Do Nothing

Dr. John M. Digney and Dr. Thom Garfat

*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil
is for good men to do nothing.*

Edmund Burke

Early Reflections

John: Like many of us, I never planned to work directly with children and families. My plan was to become a psychologist and do whatever it is that psychologists do. With an undergraduate in Psychology completed, I thought it important to get some practical experience before progressing to a post-graduate degree. So, after some job-hunting, I found myself in a post working with so-called “delinquent youth” in a secure facility just outside Dublin (Ireland). Initially I was to stay for a year or two, but having found myself intrigued with the work and the kids, I eventually realised I was beginning my 8th year of direct practice, and on a management trajectory.

In my view, throughout this early part of my career (within this facility at least) there seemed to be very little on-going development in terms of practice and understanding how best to work with this cohort of kids. The facility ran a behaviour modification system with little formal (or even informal) assessment, let alone actual therapy or treatment. Yet the relational approach that was evolving naturally (and in somewhat of a “sub-cultural” way) within the practices of the more experienced staff was having quite an impact with some of the kids.

My background in psychology helped in some ways. It kept me looking for answers and causes and allowed me to see the kids as people, not objects. But having a grounding in Behavioural Psychology wasn’t always

an advantage. It meant that the approach was to try to modify the kid's behaviour through approaches like levels systems and the like. Even though we were able to witness positive progress with the kids that we were really connecting and engaging with on a more individual level, this was discouraged. Staff who were connecting with the kids were often described by colleagues or management as colluding with kids or being unprofessional.

This didn't seem congruent ... why were the practices that seemed to work best being discouraged? In truth, over 30 years later I am still not clear on the reason, but mostly I think it was about leadership not understanding what is of greatest importance and necessity when looking to make a difference in the lives of kids and families – or maybe it was about them being uncomfortable with having to give so much of ourselves to the task. In any event it was certainly true that there was little instruction available for those of us in the profession, or those in college trainings to enter the profession.

A Turning Point

At the turn of the millennium, as part of a master's degree in Project Management, I was given time to organise an International Conference. One of the first tasks was to identify speakers, and especially a Keynote Speaker – someone who was recognised as a contemporary authority and leader in the profession. In truth this was the first time since starting my work with troubled kids that I went searching for a better understanding of where the profession was on an international level. I soon realised I didn't know nearly as much as I thought I did.

Understanding that I needed some assistance, I approached someone that I knew, who had a reach into the international community (albeit mostly on an academic level) to ask who they might consider to be a person of note, a person of interest, and considered somewhat of an "expert" in the field of working with troubled and vulnerable children, youth, and families. It was then that I heard the name Thom Garfat for the first time.

After some research and due diligence, I encountered a little editorial piece written by Thom in *CYC-Online*¹ that really made me stop and think. It made me consider how I viewed myself, the complexity of what we need

¹ <https://cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0599-editorial.html>

to do in our work, the need to understand the contexts of people's lives and the absolute imperative to give a voice to the kids who are mostly silenced by adults, peers, and society. So, I decided that I would take a chance and reach out to this seemingly enigmatic Canadian in the hope that he would take a chance on keynoting my little conference.

Beyond all hope, his response was positive, and I was soon to meet this man in Ireland in the autumn of 2001. Here was the real beginning of my entrance into the world of Child and Youth Care, and particularly the world of Relational Practice.

A Fresh Beginning

Around the time of the conference, I moved to a Deputy Director role in a new (not yet built) facility, with a new ethos (High Support). I would be developing the systems, approaches, and practice models to work with the most challenging (and vulnerable) youth, within a facility that would be therapeutic and "open" (i.e., not secure).

We were told we would be a High Support Centre, even though this was not defined in legislation, or any other way. All we knew was that we would have an on-site educational facility, access to a psychologist (if we were able to find and then hire one), and we could have a higher ratio of staff to kids (again, if we could find and hire such people). After that we could develop our own approach.

Knowing that we could not rely on a physically secure premises to keep kids from running away, and to keep them safe (from themselves and others), I had to think creatively, and having some newly acquired insight into this thing called a Child and Youth Care Approach (and access to Thom Garfat) I had a head-start developing and implementing an effective approach. We needed to know and have evidence of what worked when engaging with troubled kids, and the findings from Thom's PhD research seemed like a good place to begin better understanding what we needed to be doing.

Reflecting on Thom's own interpretation of his Phenomenological Inquiry (and seeing some things in writing) did much to provide clarity and understanding. When those things required to be effective seem so obvious, it begs the question, "Why are we not doing this all the time?"

Volume 12 (1-2) of the 1998 *Journal of Child and Youth Care* was dedicated to Thom's PhD research and ultimately informs us that effectiveness in our work requires:

- A Caring for, and Commitment to Youth.
- Self-Confidence and a Willingness to Take Responsibility.
- A General and Immediate Awareness of Self.
- A Way of Knowing and Understanding the Individual Youth.
- Experience of Intimate Familiarity in the Relationship.
- A Way of Connecting That Fits for the Youth.

Looking for additional context and understanding, I again sought out Thom to Keynote the first annual High Support conference in 2002 that unwittingly triggered a "mentoring relationship" that would open my world of Child and Youth Care and a desire to better understand and influence our understanding of Relational Practice within and beyond Child and Youth Care.

An Even Earlier Reflection

Thom: I was a late starter in this field, beginning only when I was 22 or so. I had been attending university (thinking I might become a writer) and was supporting myself, during my second year, by working as a janitor in the local welfare offices – a job that started late in the afternoon, thus allowing time for classes.

The woman who was the Director of the local welfare offices seemed to always work late and so, as I emptied her waste bucket and washed the floor, we fell into the habit of chatting about the society we live in and how people are treated differently depending on how they, or their contributions, are perceived by others. Why, for example, can artists not make a living? Why can some families manage and not others? What is our role, as relatively pain-free adults, in helping those living with pain, hurt, oppression and/or other disadvantages? Heady conversations for a relatively new university student.

Intrigued by this woman, Betty, who seemed to have such compassion and insight, I asked her one day "how does one get to work with people?" Her response was "you go and see my friend Lorne, who runs the Reception

and Diagnostic Centre for adolescents” – a fine name for what was, essentially, an emergency placement program. And so, I did.

Lorne interviewed me (Did I like kids? Was I willing to work overnights for \$2 an hour? etc.). I was hired! A casual for now, to work with what was, perhaps, the most amazing team I have encountered, even to this day – or is that just a re-created memory? People like Brenda, Noreen, Roz, and Andrew mentored me into this world of working with young people. There was no training except on-the-job experiences, and so learning and development occurred through watching each other, late overnight shifts, and stories of our encounters. It was in this team that I learned the importance of storytelling in learning; a learning that would permeate my supervision, teaching, training, and consultation throughout my career.

Oh, yes, we had a behavioural focus – mostly interested in simply changing behaviour, often through the traditional use of rewards and negative consequences, but underneath it all was a caring, even loving, concern for these young people and a heavy focus on relationships of respect and connection with them and with each other. We did not really understand the importance of this during those early years, it was just a part of “how we were, who we were,” in working with these pain-suffering young people (and eventually, their families).

I loved this world and this work from the first day. Was it because I had been (was) delinquent myself? Was I trying to help myself through helping others? Did it help me feel significant? Likely “yes” to all those questions.

During this time the team of people I was working with were interested in advancing (developing) the field of Child Care (as it was called back then). We participated in creating get-togethers, and I remember my first Child Care conference, trudging through muddy fields to camp out for a week in wet cottages, just to be together and learn from others in the field. There was no support from management, no paid expenses, just all of us motivated by our desire to do better, to find a better way, to be the best we could be. It was an amazing time of camaraderie and friendship. Enough simply to say that I found myself engaged with other folks in promoting Child Care in British Columbia.

While working at the Centre, I had continued at university eventually obtaining a degree and all the while becoming more frustrated with a system that refused to move at anything but a painstakingly snail’s pace in making important decisions for young people in care – like “Should this

Contributors

Dr. John M. Digney (Ireland) has worked with vulnerable groups since 1989 and is currently the National Training and Development Coordinator for Tusla, Ireland's Child & Family Agency. He has worked on the front line and as a manager, clinician, educator, and researcher. In addition to his public service work, he provides relational coaching, consultancy, and training internationally.



Dr. Heather Modlin (Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada) has worked in child and youth care for over 35 years and is currently CEO of Amal Youth and Family Centre. Heather has published numerous journal articles and book chapters and has served on several national and international boards. She is Chair of the Board of Governors of the CYC-Net, a Steering committee member of the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance and board member of FICE Canada.



Dr. Thom Garfat, CM (Montreal, Canada) 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 of the International Child & Youth Care Network (www.cyc-net.org) and the journal *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice*.



Jody Rhodes (Wisconsin, USA) has been the Executive Director of Neu-Life Community Development since 2003. She holds a master's degree in Administrative Leadership (2000) and a bachelor's degree in Education (1997), both from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She has over twenty-five years of experience working with youth and families and program development experience.



Dr. Lorraine E. Fox (California, USA), began her career in Child and Youth Care work in 1964, moving around from direct care, to supervision, to administration, to academia and for the past thirty years to training and consultation. Being wonderful is not required to be effective (thank goodness), but being open, persistent, and compassionate is.



Dr. Leon Fulcher (New Zealand) is an international consultant with fifty years' experience in the social work and child and youth care fields in North America, Europe, the Middle East and Oceania, as a practitioner, manager, educator, researcher, scholar and member of the Board of Governors for *The International Child and Youth Care Network* at www.cyc-net.org



Dr. Tuhinul Islam (Bangladesh) is Director of Care Transformations International and a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Edinburgh. With three decades of experience in the UK, Africa, and Asia, his work focuses on residential CYC, education, and international development. He has published extensively on alternative care and care leavers and serves on the Board of Governors of CYC-Net.



Michelle Briegel (Alberta, Canada) is a Doctoral Candidate and an Associate Professor in Child Studies and Social Work at Mount Royal University. Michelle's research includes residential group care turnover and retention, student well-being, and students as research partners. Michelle's experience outside of teaching is rooted in residential group care, practitioner training and development, and the profession of child and youth care in Canada.



Dr. Marlene Kingsmith (Alberta, Canada) is a retired professor Emerita who taught the Child and Youth Care Counsellor Diploma and the Child Studies Degree at Mount Royal University. Marlene began fostering adolescent girls and boys in the late 70s and ran a group home for 18 years. Her passion for providing safe and nurturing environments for youth has always been her number one priority.



Dr. Patricia Kostouros (Alberta, Canada) is a retired Full Professor in Child Studies and Social Work at Mount Royal University. Patricia's research includes IPV, student wellness, compassion fatigue, and trauma-sensitive teaching. Before academia Patricia managed a youth shelter, a women's shelter, and was the Executive Director of a residence for women with a trauma history.



Dr. Jenny McGrath (Alberta, Canada) is a certified child and youth care practitioner whose interests include creative pedagogy, field education, therapeutic activities, CYC history and professionalization, and relational practice. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Child and Youth Care at MacEwan University in Edmonton, AB.



Christine Pope (Alberta, Canada) is a Child and Youth Care Practitioner whose work and teaching are informed by relational practice and commitment to creating opportunities and opening pathways for learning. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Child and Youth Care at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.



Brian Hogan (Ireland) has over 35 years' experience working in complex environments. His master's degree is in Human Resource Strategy, with a PG diploma in forensic psychology. He has extensive board level experience and is trained in the seven eyes model of supervision. He is a former director of the consortium for therapeutic communities.



Jack Phelan (Alberta, Canada and Arizona, USA) is an emeritus professor at MacEwan University and the author of several books and chapters on Child and Youth Care (CYC). He has been a CYC practitioner for many years and has thoroughly enjoyed his career.



Lesley Goodyear (Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada) has worked in the CYC field for the past 20 years. She has worked within a variety of areas in the CYC field including group care, family support, residential treatment. Lesley also has a background in teaching both CYC and Psychology at the post-secondary level. She is currently a Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) and Person Brain trainer.



Dr Laura Steckley (USA & Scotland) leads the MSc in Advanced Residential Child Care at the University of Strathclyde and so has the good fortune of teaching and learning with residential child care practitioners. She has worked in direct and indirect practice in both the USA and Scotland.



Dr. Varda Mann-Feder (Montreal, Canada) is Professor in the Graduate Diploma in Youth Work at Concordia University in Montreal. She is known across Canada for her advocacy on behalf of youth aging out of care. Varda worked for thirty years in the Child Welfare System in Montreal where she served as consultant to numerous child and youth care teams.



Dr Howard Bath (Australia) has been a youth worker, house parent, program manager and agency director before training as a Clinical Psychologist. Howard was the inaugural Children's Commissioner in Australia's NT with a mission to promote the wellbeing of vulnerable children in that jurisdiction.



Dr Zeni Thumbadoo (South Africa) is a key leader in South Africa's National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW) and has designed innovative approaches to child and youth care services. She spearheaded the scale-up of the Isibindi and Safe Park models with government, reaching over a million children. She holds a PhD degree in child and youth care work.



Dr James Anglin (British Columbia, Canada) is Emeritus Professor and former Director, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, Canada, a Research Affiliate of the Residential Child Care Project, Bronfenbrenner Centre for Translational Research, Cornell University, President of FICE-Canada, and a passionate advocate for professional CYC and quality care for children.



Noor Almaoui (California, USA) is an Implementation Specialist at Sycamores in Los Angeles. She is a tri-lingual owner of Universal Ethos, Inc. providing a variety of mental health and social services for children and adults nationally and internationally, as well as presented at CYC Conferences in the USA, Canada and Ireland.



Frank Delano (New York, USA) has enjoyed a long history in the Child and Youth Care field, beginning as a Child Care Worker. He is now enjoying training, consulting and coaching others working with children at all levels. He has presented at nearly 100 CYC Conferences and has published numerous journal articles.



Kerri Hayley (Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada) has worked in the field of child and youth care since 2006. She is a manager of Out of Home Care with Amal Youth and Family Centre. Kerri is a certified Psychological Health and Safety Advisor and a trainer for The Person Brain Model and Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI).



Dr. Kelly Shaw (Nova Scotia, Canada) is a long-time practitioner, educator, and community advocate in CYC, holding a PhD in Education. Kelly has spent over three decades working alongside young people and families in diverse contexts, and post-secondary education and is committed to relational, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed practice. Kelly is actively involved in local initiatives that support social justice.



Travis Sampson (Nova Scotia, Canada) is a Child and Youth Care Practitioner from Nova Scotia, Canada, graduating from the NSCC Child and Youth Care (CYC) Diploma program in 2012. He spent the first 6 years of his career working in 24/7 group care programs in Nova Scotia before spending 2 years in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut working both frontline, and as Program Manager supporting Inuit youth. He is currently a full-time faculty member in the CYC Program at NSCC.



Heather Sago (Ontario, Canada) is a certified Child and Youth Care Practitioner, college professor, and Registered Social Worker. With over three decades in child and youth-serving systems, she champions relational safety as the foundation of meaningful change, healing, and dignity-centered practice. Her work centres hope, mattering, and the mentorship legacy she now pays forward



Max Smart (Scotland) has over 40 years of working in both social care and social work with vulnerable people. Max has specialised in child and youth care provisions with vulnerable teenagers, particularly in residential care, but has extensive experience in family practice, working with offenders. He is a trainer in various disciplines, in relational practice, and supporting development with young people in difficulty.



As I read the passages, I reflected on my own growth and the relationships that shaped me, and my heart was warmed by the power of genuine human connection.

Mark Strother - Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Cal Farley's, USA

The book will be a valuable resource to all those who work with people in human services and leadership development and inspires a growth mindset.

Rosarii Mannion - National Director People and Change, Tusla, Ireland

The authors and contributors bring an unprecedented wealth of history and experiences in our field with the unbreakable common thread being the immense value of relationships.

Kari Sisson - Executive Director, ACRC, USA

Woven through this book are narratives and themes that speak directly to many if not all of the fundamental principles of relational practice.

Shane Murdoch - Director, TransformOutcomes, New Zealand

This book encouraged me to reflect on my own journey and experience in mentorship; both as a practitioner and as a leader considering how to strengthen mentoring within my own organization.

Renee Piercey - Executive Director, Waypoints Inc., St Johns, Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada

... we learn [what mentoring] is and what it isn't, how it usually develops organically rather than in a planned way, and how it is a gift that keeps on giving, helping equip the next generation of child and youth care workers.

Simon Walsh - CEO, Allambi Care, New South Wales, Australia

We need tradition – we stand on the shoulders of giants. Many of those giants, along with their ideas, grace these pages. They tell the story of where we have come from and why that is important. They lay down solid foundations for the field.

Mark Smith - Professor of Social Work, School of Humanities, Social Sciences and Law, Division of Education and Society, University of Dundee, Scotland

This book does not set out to define the concept of 'mentoring,' but to demonstrate that mentoring may first be a feeling experienced by the mentee, and that mentorship follows as the process. It was fascinating to read about the deep intimacies woven throughout the relationships in these chapters. Many of the relationships described felt not only helpful but, in some cases, therapeutic (though not in the clinical sense).

Ernie Hilton - Executive Director, HomeBridge Youth Society, Nova Scotia, Canada

These stories serve as a record of our field, preserving the lived experiences and reflective moments that too often pass quietly between us. It reminds us that Child and Youth Care has always been about relationship at its core, and that through those connections we keep learning, again and again about who we are and how we grow together in this practice."

Joanne Fraser - CYC Faculty, Nova Scotia Community College, Nova Scotia, Canada



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