



Committing to Excellence: Relational Leading and Learning in Challenging Times

November 10-11, 2025

Bonnington Hotel, Dublin, Ireland

in association with











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Conference Theme

Committing to Excellence: Relational Leading and Learning in Challenging Times

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. Now, within a post-Covid, AI, and politically unstable landscape, it has become ever more necessary that the hard fought for 'learning and leadership' continues to be remembered and built on by the younger generations of practitioners, educators and researchers.

The successful **UNITY 2024** conference concentrated its attention on 'Resetting The Foundation Stones of Relational Practice', and this year, **UNITY 2025** will continue to build on this learning, sharing and exploration by creating a space to meet with colleagues from around the world, listen to and engage in presentations and workshops, get involved in conversations and discussions, and generally get a chance to contribute to the plan for 'developing the learning' and discussing 'future leadership and approaches' within the relational framework.

Speakers from around the world will present across a spectrum of related topics that can be viewed as relevant to the 'leading and learning' themes. Sessions will speak to the relevance and utility of the conference theme and support attendees to build on what we already know to shape future leadership.

Registration

Pre-Registration: This link will give access to the 'pre-registration' page, where there is a €30 per day discount on the first 30 tickets. <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/pre-registration-for-unity-2025-tickets-1413253492239?>

Registration: This is the 'regular' link to register for a place at UNITY 2025 and will be the only link to book places after the pre-registration sale has ended or the pre-registration tickets are all sold: <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/registration-for-unity-conference-2025-tickets-1422495645769?>

Accommodation

Accommodation is booked separately, and we have a conference rate of €130 per night B&B (single) and €150 per night (double).

To book accommodation at the conference venue, please visit <https://www.bonningtondublin.com>

Click **BOOK ONLINE**, select dates and click **SEARCH**, click on **CODE** and then enter **UNITY25**, Click **APPLY** (Please ensure you have entered the correct number of guests.)

Auction

Unity 2025 will again be hosting an auction in support of the work of [CYC-Net](#). You can support this initiative by bringing along an item for auction.

Late Breaking Information

Please visit www.unityconference.org for all late breaking information.

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Programme-at-a-Glance: Day 1

MAIN HALL		DOWNSTAIRS 1	DOWNSTAIRS 2	UPSTAIRS
MONDAY 10 NOVEMBER 2025				
8.30	Registration			
9.30	Opening			
9.45	KEYNOTE Michelle Briegel (Canada) Staying Power: Relational Leadership as a Pathway to Workforce Retention in Human Services			
10.30	PLENARY Karin Mighty (Canada) Courageous Conversations: A Toolkit for Fostering Inclusivity in the Workplace			
11.15	BREAK			
11.30	Dr Angelique Jenney and Krista West (Canada) Exploring the Use of Simulation-Based Learning to Promote Trauma-Informed Care Approaches for Youth in Therapeutic Campus-Based Care	Eva Ihasz and Flora Bacso (Hungary) Parents as Effective Leaders: Supporting Caregivers to Heal Relational Disruptions and Build Resilient Communities	Moira Robertson (Canada) ‘I Don’t Know Who I Am or What I Do’: Growing up on the Autism Spectrum, (Un)blissfully Unaware	Dr Clive Acraman and Natalie Dow (UK) The Importance of Family in Relational Leading and Learning in Challenging Times
12.15				
13.00	LUNCH			
14.00	Wendy Gee (Canada) Holding the Thread: Relational Leadership Rooted in Lived Experience	Martin Stabrey (South Africa) From Care to Connection	Dr. Julie Drolet (Canada) Transforming the Field Education Landscape: Promising, Wise and Innovative Practices for Relational Leading and Practicum Learning	Kelsey Hagen (Canada) OK Boomer: How to Stay Hip with Younger Generations
14.45	Caitlin-Anne Dow (UK) The Cards You're Dealt: Uncomfortable Reflective Practice	Kari Sisson (USA) Building a framework for best practices through the VOICE of lived experience	Dr. Emmie Henderson-Dekort (Canada) Advocacy in Action: How CYCPs Champion Children’s Rights and the Case for Professional Regulation	Vicki French, Jamie Lynn Greene and Olivia Hynes (Canada) Leaning into Discomfort: Getting Comfortable with the Uncomfortable through Role-play
15.30	BREAK			
15.45	Stephanie Hillman and Fiona Duncan (UK) Pausing for Change: Remodelling Relational and Reflective Practice in Residential Care	Emma Harding (USA) Creating a Workforce with Compassion Resilience and Well-Being	Katherine Raynor, Kathryn Hunter and Dr. Mette Christiansen (USA) The Educational Path to a Relationally Oriented Professional Direct Support Workforce in the United States	Ziigwanbinesii Charles and Aurrora De Monte (Canada) Bridges, Not Barriers
16.30	Stephanie Hunter (UK) Relational systems: Rehumanising stories			
17.15	END OF DAY 1			



Programme-at-a-Glance: Day 2

MAIN HALL		DOWNSTAIRS 1		DOWNSTAIRS 2		UPSTAIRS	
TUESDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2025							
8.30	Registration						
9.30	Opening						
9.45	KEYNOTE Dr Grant Charles (Canada) Our History of Hating Children: Time to Rethink Who We are and What We Do						
10.30	PLENARY Jessica Williams and K. Larisa Hanssen (Canada) Practice What You Teach: Using Relational Praxis to Lead Collective Care in Faculty-Faculty Relationships						
11.15	BREAK						
11.30	Shay Fulham, Colette Heerey and Siobhan Crosby (Ireland) Supporting Families to Heal from Within	Jill Thompson, Maureen Cullen, Chelan McCallion (Canada) Fragments of Unsettling: A Collective Zine on Relational Practice	Michelle Holbrook and Andy Leggett (Canada) Embedding Relational Practice in Organisational Culture	Frank Delano (USA) Leading to Excellence: Not Settling for "Just Good Enough"			
12.15	Thais Costa Rabelo Amorim (Canada) Relational Leading Through Transformative Learning in CYC Education						
13.00	LUNCH						
14.00	Kirsten Hargreaves (Canada) Paws (Pause) for Hope	Yvonne Gomez (Canada) Social Justice Action as part of Relational Practice in the Child and Youth Care Classroom	Dr. Elizabeth Noonan (Ireland) Aftercare Workers' Experiences of Mental Health Needs of Care Leavers: A Mixed Qualitative Methods Approach	David Power (Ireland) Committing to Excellence - Good Enough is Good Enough: A Community and Voluntary Perspective of What is "Good Enough"			
14.45	Derek Byrne and Adam Reidy (Ireland) My Story Through Care: A Pedagogical Experience	John Byrne (Ireland) Triggers and Tripwires: Navigating the Complexities of Consent vs Exposure in Social Care Education	Dr Ronan Gibney (Ireland) Helping young people in residential care make educational and therapeutic progress – the development of an integrated, in-house support service	Brian Hogan and Selenna Reilly (Ireland) Strength in Experience, and how that transfers from Senior to Newer Practitioners and Students			
15.30	BREAK						
15.45	ENDNOTE Dr Mark Smith (Scotland) The Roots of Child & Youth Care in Residential Care						
16.45	CONFERENCE CLOSING Dr John Digney						



KEYNOTE

10 NOVEMBER 9.45-10.30 | MAIN HALL

Staying Power: Relational Leadership as a Pathway to Workforce Retention in Human Services

Michelle Briegel

Frontline practitioners in child and youth care and broader human services sectors are facing unprecedented pressures—under-resourced environments, emotional burnout, and complex client needs. Workforce turnover continues to rise, undermining consistency in care and damaging professional morale.

This presentation shares findings from a qualitative research study exploring the lived experiences of child and youth care workers navigating the decision to stay or leave their roles. Drawing from interviews with frontline staff in residential and community-based settings, the research uncovers how relational leadership, mentorship, and a culture of belonging significantly influence retention.

Grounded in relational practice and the principles of the Circle of Courage, this session invites participants to reflect on how relational leading—not just managing—can support excellence, resilience, and workforce stability in challenging times. Participants will leave with concrete strategies to foster connection, professional identity, and staying power within their teams and organizations.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Understand key factors influencing human service staff retention, including emotional labor, supervision quality, and workplace culture.*
- *Explore how relational leadership approaches contribute to staff engagement and commitment.*
- *Reflect on personal and organizational practices that promote retention through mentorship, recognition, and relational accountability.*
- *Identify practical, relationship-centered strategies that leaders and practitioners can implement to strengthen team cohesion and staff well-being.*

Michelle Briegel, M.Ed., is an educator, researcher, and practitioner with over 30 years of experience in child and youth care. An Associate Professor at Mount Royal University and President of the Child and Youth Care Association of Alberta, she is completing doctoral research on workforce retention in residential care. Michelle is known for her leadership in relational practice, practitioner development, and trauma-informed education. Her work is grounded in a commitment to relational accountability, inclusive practice, and the lived realities of care workers. She brings a unique blend of academic insight and practitioner experience to her presentations, always centering the voices of those working closest to young people.



PLENARY

10 NOVEMBER 10.30-11.15 | MAIN HALL

Courageous Conversations: A Toolkit for Fostering Inclusivity in the Workplace

Karen Mighty

Creating inclusive environments requires more than policies, it demands courageous conversations rooted in empathy, cultural humility, and a willingness to confront discomfort. In this session, participants will explore the foundations of courageous conversations and how they can be used as a strategic tool to advance inclusion and belonging in diverse teams. Drawing from lived experience and practical applications, this presentation introduces a toolkit designed to help individuals engage in meaningful dialogue across lines of difference. Participants will learn strategies to navigate difficult topics such as bias, microaggressions and identity. Through case example and interactive discussion, attendees will walk away with practical tools to support courageous conversations and meaningful self-reflection. Whether you are a leader, practitioner, or team member, this session will equip you with the language, mindset, and framework to lead inclusively through conversation.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Identify Key Elements of Courageous Conversations: Participants will be able to recognize the core components—such as emotional safety, empathy, and cultural humility—that make conversations across difference impactful and inclusive.*
- *Experience using a toolkit: Participants will gain hands-on experience using a toolkit designed to guide courageous conversations and self-reflection, helping them navigate sensitive topics with confidence and care.*
- *Enhance Personal Awareness: Participants will deepen their understanding of how intent and impact influence dialogue and will leave with actionable steps to foster psychological safety and inclusivity within their teams.*

Karen Mighty - As Director of DEI at The George Hull Centre for Children and Families, I am honoured to serve by equipping others with tools that foster awareness and inclusion. I believe that courageous conversations help to create a culture of belonging where everyone feels seen, heard, and respected. Inclusion begins when we choose courage and connection.



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10 NOVEMBER 11.30-13.00 | MAIN HALL

Exploring the Use of Simulation-Based Learning to Promote Trauma-Informed Care Approaches for Youth in Therapeutic Campus-Based Care

Angelique Jenney and Krista West

Therapeutic Campus-Based Care (TCBC) environments require skill staff to provide support and intervention for young people in care with complex needs. The onboarding resources for staff is significant and distressing experiences occurring early in a new worker's trajectory can discourage them from remaining in the field to the point of developing desired competence and mastery for this difficult work. Simulation-based learning (SBL) offers a range of learning scenarios that can be experienced safely to build knowledge and insight. Multiple complex scenarios in the form of virtual gaming simulations (VGS) were created as a mechanism to improve access to trauma-informed care skills training and piloted in a study with 92 care workers. This presentation will describe the use of SBL within TCBC settings and discuss preliminary findings from our relational and reflective practice study. Participants will have the opportunity to engage with the SBL scenario and discuss experiences and practice implications.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Simulation-based learning can be an effective and accessible form for skills development.*
- *Reflective practice is a key component to relational practice with youth in care.*
- *Virtual gaming simulations are a promising avenue for facilitating the development of reflective practice skills in child and youth care practitioners.*

Angelique Jenney, MSW, PhD, RSW is an Associate Professor and the Wood's Homes Research Chair in Children's Mental Health in the Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary. Dr. Jenney has 25 years of experience in intervention and prevention services within the violence against women, child protection and children's mental health sectors. Her community-based, simulation research and practice interests focus on trauma-informed approaches to working with young people in care and their families, in addition to the use of reflective, simulation-based learning approaches to training both students and practitioners in the field.

Krista West, MSW, is Director of the Therapeutic Campus Based Care Program at Wood's Homes, a multi-service, non-profit children's mental health center based in Calgary. Prior to this, Krista's focus was centered on children's mental health and systemic family therapy, where she delivered services to many families through the Calgary Family Therapy Centre and Alberta Health Services, School Based Mental Health Program. Krista's passion remains gaining a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between a child's lived experiences, and their overall mental wellbeing.



10 NOVEMBER 11.30-13.00 | DOWNSTAIRS 1

Parents as Effective Leaders: Supporting Caregivers to Heal Relational Disruptions and Build Resilient Communities

Eva Ihasz and Flora Bacso

Hand in Hand Parenting Program (HiH) is a trauma-responsive caregiving approach that supports parents in becoming active agents of change within their families and communities.

Grounded in evidence-based practices, HiH uses five simple tools to foster the healing of relational disruptions and strengthen the caregiver-child bond. Many families across the globe face adversity and lack adequate societal support to navigate the challenges that often result in deep feelings of isolation and stress. When adults who care for children receive consistent support, they become the emotionally attuned leaders in their families. This creates a ripple effect that allows whole communities to thrive.

Transforming society into a more just and cooperative place begins with supporting parents to heal from past wounds, build strong connections with their children, and take an active leadership role within their families and communities.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *To introduce five practical tools — Listening Partnership, Staylistening, Special Time, Playlistening, and Setting Limits—that foster listening, compassion, and hope for a brighter future.*
- *To gain insight into the important role of laughter, crying, tantrums, trembling in restoring cognitive functioning in both children and adults.*
- *To explore examples of how Hand in Hand Parenting tools can be implemented in professional environments.*

Flora Bacso is graduated as an English and French teacher, now a trainer of mediation and Restorative Practices, Somatic Experiencing Practitioner, family therapist in training and a certified Hand in Hand Parenting instructor. She has trained 300+ school professionals in mediation, has held numerous workshops within ECEC and school settings, with a special focus on trauma-informed approach and neurodiversity. She has been leading workshops on sex education and parental strategies with neurodivergent children.

Eva Ihasz is a certified Hand in Hand Parenting Instructor and a Qualified Social Worker currently completing an MA in Psychology, specializing in Developmental and Clinical Child Psychology. She has worked in various care settings, including a drug rehabilitation program based on the Therapeutic Community Model, therapeutic residential child care in the UK, and as a foster care network leader at SOS Children's Villages Hungary. She has facilitated Trauma-Informed Care sessions and is also a trainer in the WHO's Early Adolescent Skills for Emotions program.

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10 NOVEMBER 11.30-13.00 | DOWNSTAIRS 2

'I Don't Know Who I Am or What I Do': Growing up on the Autism Spectrum (Un)blissfully Unaware

Moira Robertson

Everyone has a script they just forgot to give me," is how it feels to grow up on the spectrum and not know. But what about when two decades later someone finally hands you "the script" and it is still somehow the wrong one. This presentation will look at the imposter syndrome we can all feel at some point and discuss ways to navigate the challenges of figuring out who you are and what you want to do. While sharing the tips learned along the way balancing a new diagnosis and suddenly having to introduce yourself as "an Autistic Adult" to a room full of doctors waiting to hear you sound like you know what you're saying, when you haven't ever 'been' an Autistic kid.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Diagnoses and understanding are life saving care, so are the people you meet along the way in the world of disability advocacy. Child and Youth Care workers can build the bridges needed to facilitate both of these, thus broadening our field and growing the understanding of those with disabilities like autism in today's society.*

Moira Robertson - As a late-diagnosed autistic woman, Moira is passionate about enhancing quality of life and understanding for autistic individuals. She has co-authored resources for Aide Canada, contributed to numerous conferences, community settings, and youth advisory councils. Her experience spans a variety of Child and Youth Care settings, where she supports neurodiverse children and youth. Her education includes an advanced diploma in Child and Youth Care, a Bachelors in Child and Youth Studies at Trent University and starting into a master's at the Rehabilitation Sciences Institute and the University of Toronto. Moira's advocacy emphasizes practical strategies to empower neurodivergent individuals to thrive.



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10 NOVEMBER 11.30-13.00 | UPSTAIRS

The Importance of Family in Relational Leading and Learning in Challenging Times

Dr Clive Acraman and Natalie Dow

Great leaders share power, listen and learn alongside their teams and those who use the service. It has never been more important to recognise the value of co-design alongside the people who rely on their support. Family can be identified in many different guises: Traditional (nuclear) Family, Extended Family, Foster Family, Group Care (Families) living, for example. Important for leaders is learning how supporting agencies & practitioners communicate how they understand "What is important to" individuals or families holistically, and "What support they need to be successful" individually, or as a group.

We will focus on the use of person-centred thinking tools and appreciative leadership approaches to enable the voices of children and their families to be heard and learned from. Our approach aims to empower communities, individual children and their families to remain at the centre of co-designed interventions avoiding over reliance on professional / practitioner input.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Co-production of services, learning what is needed together.*
- *The importance of community and family to sustainable support.*
- *Exploring how shared power increases trust and positive outcomes.*

Dr Clive Acraman has supported Children and their Families in a variety of settings including Residential Care, Domiciliary Care, Early Years and Child Protection Social Work since 1981. Clive's practice is informed by praxis and a lifelong friendship with his friend Paul who lived with, but was never defined by, learning disabilities. This underpins his approach to Relational Practice, Appreciative Leadership, Organisational Learning and Person-Centred Practice. Clive believes that when organisations and their people have a shared vision and understand their purpose and roles, they can truly personalise the care and support they provide.

Natalie Dow Is a Leadership Coach, Consultant and Facilitator with over 20yrs experience specialising in health and social care. Nat is a parent of two remarkable neurodivergent teenagers who have taught her invaluable lessons about relationships, leadership and compassion which inform her practice. With an academic background in psychology and a special interest in compassionate leadership, relationship building and lived experience, Nat supports leaders across the sector to develop compassionate cultures and transform services for the benefit of the populations they serve. Nat facilitates leadership programmes for multi-disciplinary events and provides 1x1 and team coaching for Executives, clinicians and practitioners.

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10 NOVEMBER 14.00-14.45 | MAIN HALL

Holding the Thread: Relational Leadership Rooted in Lived Experience

Wendy Gee

This session offers a deeply personal and practical exploration of what it means to lead from a place of lived experience in today's fractured systems of care. As someone who has both survived and led through instability—gender-based violence, burnout culture, and structural inequities—I'll invite participants to join me in reflecting on how we hold the thread of relational practice when everything around us feels like it's unravelling. Together, we'll explore what it means to create space for hope, connection, and shared leadership in real time—with youth, with colleagues, and with our own stories. Through narrative, relational exercises, and tools grounded in trauma-informed and survivor-led models, this session will centre care not as a soft skill but as a radical, powerful framework for transformational leadership in uncertain times.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Leading with Lived Experience: Understand how lived experience can be a foundation for ethical, relational leadership and how to challenge systems that minimize or tokenize it.*
- *Sustaining Relational Practice in Systems That Harm: Learn practical, heart-centered strategies for holding onto relational values when navigating systems that often operate in contradiction to care (e.g., funding bodies, child welfare, education, and justice systems).*
- *Building Relational Pathways for the Next Generation: Explore how we intentionally pass on wisdom, values, and practices to emerging practitioners and youth through co-creation, storytelling, and inclusive mentorship.*

Wendy Gee is a survivor, advocate, and nationally recognized leader in anti-human trafficking and trauma-informed care. With over 30 years in the social service sector, she is the Executive Director of A New Day Youth and Adult Services and Chair of the Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking. Wendy leads with lived experience, relational integrity, and a deep commitment to healing-centered engagement. Her work bridges policy, practice, and storytelling to build systems rooted in care and equity. A sought-after speaker and educator, Wendy is passionate about mentoring the next generation of practitioners through authenticity, connection, and collective wisdom.



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10 NOVEMBER 14.00-14.45 | DOWNSTAIRS 1

From Care to Connection

Martin Stabrey

This session will briefly chart the life course of the presenter from his time in a 64-bed residential care programme in South Africa to “care experienced” adult, latterly as head of operations of CYC-Net (The International Child and Youth Care Network) and The CYC-Net Press.

The session will include discussion of the definition of family, relational care practice, the future of group care as well as a brief introduction to The International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net).

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *The presenter’s overwhelmingly positive experience of residential care*
- *Brief discussions around what constitutes a “Family” unit, Relational Practice in residential care, and the future (if any) for residential/group/congregate care around the world*
- *How CYC-Net supports the development and growth of the field of Child and Youth Care.*

Martin Stabrey lives with his family in Cape Town, South Africa. He is a product of an excellent residential care program in South Africa. He studied Economics and Information Technology at the University of South Africa after which he went into business, establishing Pretext Publishing. For the past decade Martin has been the Chief Operations Officer of The International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net) and The CYC-Net Press.



AMAL YOUTH AND FAMILY CENTRE

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10 NOVEMBER 14.00-14.45 | DOWNSTAIRS 2

Transforming the Field Education Landscape: Promising, Wise and Innovative Practices for Relational Leading and Practicum Learning

Dr Julie Drolet

Practicum, also known as field education, is widely recognized as the signature pedagogy in social work education. Many social work education programs are experiencing significant challenges with delivering practicum experiences for students. This presentation will share the outcomes of the Transforming the Field Education Landscape (TFEL) partnership's six-year program, including research results from 104 interviews, 31 focus group discussions (n=99) and 9 roundtable sessions (n=218) on promising, wise, and innovative practices, conducted with students, academics, field educators, and supervisors across Canada. The findings illustrate pathways to more sustainable practices of field education that promote relational leading and learning that include 1) community-engaged placements, 2) field supervision, 3) partnerships and collaboration, 4) flexibility, 5) using technology, 6) macro-level placements, 7) Indigenous-centered practices, and 8) equity, diversity and inclusion. Challenges and opportunities will be discussed in our contemporary context and how to advance relational leading and learning in community-engaged field work.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Field education is at a critical crossroads, and addressing its current challenges requires innovative, flexible, and inclusive approaches grounded in community engagement and relational learning.*
- *The TFEL partnership created an inventory of promising, wise and innovative practices for social work field education, including use of technology, macro-level placements, and field supervision—that can transform the sustainability and effectiveness of practicum experiences.*
- *Relational leading and learning are essential to advancing field education, and require strong partnerships, equity-focused frameworks, and a commitment to co-creating meaningful, learning opportunities.*

Dr. Julie L. Drolet is a Professor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary in Canada. She is an internationally recognized expert in international social work with multiple research partnerships and publications in field education, disaster recovery, climate change adaptation, child and youth resilience, social development, sustainable development, social protection, and immigrant settlement and integration. She serves as the Project Director for Transforming the Field Education Landscape project funded by a SSHRC Partnership Grant; Editor-in-Chief of the Transformative Social Work journal; and founder of the Social Work and Disaster (SWAD) network. She is principal investigator on many large, multi-investigator, national and international research projects.



10 NOVEMBER 14.00-14.45 | UPSTAIRS

OK Boomer: How to Stay Hip with Younger Generations

Kelsey Hagen

Do you have FOMO when trying to connect with the youth you work with? Do you even know what FOMO is? Are kids these days using terms and slang that you've never heard of? This presentation aims to demystify younger generations and the references they make. With each new generation, the gap between ourselves and the youth we work with seems greater and greater. It can be hard to connect with youth when you don't even know what they're saying or referencing.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Simplify ways to connect with younger generations, using a youth care lens*
- *Gain contextual knowledge on the implications of technology and current events on younger generations*
- *Educate on ways to ...*

Kelsey Hagen is a CYC who currently practices in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She has been in the field for 6 years professionally but has been working and volunteering with children most of her life. Kelsey has a particular interest in trauma-informed practice, how trauma impacts youth development and the intersection of trauma and substance usage among youth. When she isn't working, she enjoys cuddling with her cats, Hector and Gus, and a good afternoon nap.



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10 NOVEMBER 14.45-15.30 | MAIN HALL

The Cards You're Dealt: Uncomfortable Reflective Practice

Caitlin-Anne Dow

Reflective practice has been used in practitioner environments for years and is promoted as the best way to facilitate excellent care. Unfortunately, reflecting on problems in work with children and young people can often feel like hitting a wall. Practitioners are limited by timeframes, budgets, to-do lists and expectations that they can feel powerless to change. It's easy to conclude that, at the end of the day, you can only work with the cards you're given.

However, in my experiences with practitioners, I was always frustrated by the times when professionals could have helped me if they'd only changed their perspective. It's easy to focus on the problems we can't change, and these issues are important to discuss; however, deep, uncomfortable reflection can help practitioners to play their cards more effectively. This session will focus on how reflective practice can be used to provide excellent services for children and young people regardless of the deck your cards are dealt from.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *To focus on the 'why' of reflective practice*
- *To develop skills to go past surface-level reflection*
- *To learn to be comfortable with the necessity of uncomfortable reflection.*

Caitlin-Anne Dow – I'm a 19yr old neurodivergent student, studying SEND at Plymouth Marjon University. I'm passionate about improving the experiences of disabled young people by working with practitioners and organisations. I'm a Youth MH First Aider, have sat on the Cornwall Youth Council SEND subcommittee and spoken on its behalf to the SEND board. I've presented to Cornwall Council, spoken at online and in-person conferences, and produced resources for young people, including a children's e-book and educational content for a specialist paediatric OT service. I've supported SEND students formally, as a personal chaperone and on placement, and informally as a student mentor and friend.



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10 NOVEMBER 14.45-15.30 | DOWNSTAIRS 1

Building a Framework for Best Practices Through the VOICE of Lived Experience

Kari Sisson

ACRC has been publishing position papers for two decades as part of a *Redefining Residential* series. These short thinkpieces examine components of residential interventions through both a best practice lens and, more importantly, through the lens of individuals with lived experience.

Come along on the journey from our initial topics of conversation (*Becoming Family Driven* and *Ensuring the Preconditions for Transformation*) to the pressing topics of today (*Hiring Peer Support Specialists* and *Moving Away from Point and Level Systems*). Let's discuss how elevating and empowering the voice of lived experience is the true catalyst to transformational change.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Attendees will have an understanding of transformational change in the field of residential interventions.*
- *Attendees will learn how to elevate and empower the voice of lived experience.*
- *Attendees will have a vision for current and future efforts to ensure best practices in a global context.*

Kari Sisson has held the role of Executive Director of the Association of Children's Residential and Community Services for nearly two decades, guiding the association, its members, and the field at large toward best practices, clinical excellence, and innovation. Kari has moved this US-based organization into international conversations on children's mental health, building key relationships aligned with ACRC's mission and vision. Inspired by her own nine children and those brave enough to offer the voice of lived experience, it is her personal and professional quest to challenge disparities around mental health and to ensure uncompromised access to high quality services and supports for all young people and their families.



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10 NOVEMBER 14.45-15.30 | DOWNSTAIRS 2

Advocacy in Action: How CYCPs Champion Children's Rights and the Case for Professional Regulation

Dr. Emmie Henderson-Dekort

This workshop explores the critical role that Child and Youth Care Practitioners (CYCPs) play in advocating for children's rights within diverse professional settings across Canada. Focusing on the challenges of inconsistent care practices, lack of professional recognition, and regulatory frameworks, participants will learn how CYCPs can effectively advocate for children's rights while pushing for better regulation and professional standards. Through case studies, collaborative discussions, and action-planning activities, this workshop aims to empower CYCPs to use their frontline expertise to drive change, ensuring that children's rights are upheld in practice. By fostering a deeper understanding of these issues, participants will also contribute to the movement for increased professionalization and regulation within the CYC field, ultimately enhancing the quality of care provided to children and youth.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Understanding the Impact of Unregulated Practices on Children's Rights: Participants will learn how inconsistent care practices and the absence of regulatory frameworks can lead to violations of children's rights, as defined by the UNCRC, and how CYCPs can address these issues in their daily work.*
- *Advocating for a Rights-Based Approach in CYC Practice: Participants will develop the skills to advocate for children's rights within their professional settings, understanding the importance of integrating a rights-based approach into their practice to promote protection, participation, and well-being.*
- *Advancing Professionalization and Regulation in the CYC Field: By the end of the workshop, participants will be equipped with practical tools and strategies to advocate for stronger professional standards and regulatory oversight, contributing to the professionalization of the CYC field and ensuring better protection of children's rights.*

Emmie Henderson-Dekort is an Assistant Professor in the Bachelor of Child Studies (BCST) degree program at Mount Royal University, Alberta, Canada. Her research interests and expertise are centered on children and youth rights, participatory action research, and amplifying the voices of young individuals. She is deeply committed to the principles outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and incorporates these into her teaching and research activities. Her work emphasizes the importance of educating both practitioners and young individuals about the UNCRC to ensure that children's rights are understood, respected, and implemented in various contexts. In addition to her academic work, Emmie has extensive practical experience working directly with children and youth in the field.



10 NOVEMBER 14.45-15.30 | UPSTAIRS

Leaning into Discomfort: Getting Comfortable with the Uncomfortable through Role-play

Vicki French, Jamie Lynn Greene and Olivia Hynes

During this interactive session we will be leaning into the discomfort often felt while navigating difficult conversations in the field of Child and Youth Care. Our practice is relational at its core. Which means being vulnerable, making mistakes, learning from those mistakes, and supporting others to do the same. This interactive session will explore the use of role-play as a tool for growth. By utilizing neutral holding environments to practice skills through role-play, the likelihood of said skills being accessed while facing discomfort increases significantly.

As Napoleon Hill said, 'Strength and growth only come through continuous effort and struggle.' This session will have an informative component to dive into the meaning of a Holding Environment, growth culture, and lived experiences from the presenters, followed by group and individual role-play. The skills built on in this session will come from a solution-based perspective and intend to be transferable to all areas of practice and all those served through child and youth care work.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *We can do hard things.*
- *Gaining motivation from our anxious minds.*
- *Using discomfort to facilitate growth.*

Jamie Lynn Greene has been working with children, youth, and families in Newfoundland and Labrador since 2010. She is currently in the role of Manager of Out of Home Care at AMAL Youth and Family Centre, and has been in leadership roles since 2016. During this time her and her husband also provided therapeutic family based care in their home. She has been facilitating "Understanding and Managing Aggressive Behaviors" training since 2019. Jamie Lynn gravitates towards working frontline with our youth and colleagues, which further fuels her passion for relational practice and leadership. She strives to incorporate relational practices into staff development and growth, and hopes to inspire staff to embrace the beautiful complexity of relational child and youth care practice.

Vicki French has been in the field of Child and Youth Care for over 10 years, a Program Supervisor since 2022, with her first love being front-line relational work. She is passionate about lifelong learning, the power of a relationship to further growth and the use of creative interventions to best meet the needs of those she works with. Vicki facilitates a variety of trainings within the organization, thrives off social connections and learning from their unique perspectives, and avails of any opportunity to challenge herself.

Olivia Hynes found her calling in the field of Child and Youth Care after completing a Bachelors in Therapeutic Recreation. She is currently in a role of Program Supervisor with Amal Youth and Family Centre. Prior to this role, Olivia worked as a SNAP Child and Family Worker, facilitated groups with Y Mind and worked as a frontline Child and Youth Care Worker. Olivia welcomes challenges in the form of training facilitation, colleague mentoring, and consistent self-reflection, striving to improve her skills to benefit the staff and youth she supervises.

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10 NOVEMBER 15.45-16.30 | MAIN HALL

Pausing for Change: Remodelling Relational and Reflective Practice in Residential Care

Stephanie Hillman and Fiona Duncan

Our presentation will delve into the transformative journey of a residential setting as it adapted its consultancy model. This evolution was driven by the crucial understanding that effectively supporting children and young people necessitates directly supporting those who care for them. We will explore the organisational development process that prompted a critical re-evaluation and restructuring in reflective practice. The session will offer insight into what meaningful and impactful reflective practice looks like in this revised model. Furthermore, we can explore the collaboration of training and psychological services in implementing this new approach. Crucially, the session will allow participants to actively engage, share their own experiences and perspectives, and pose questions to the presenters, fostering a rich and collaborative learning environment

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Leaders have to be vulnerable to relationally lead and develop staff teams.*
- *Create a cohesive team around the child.*
- *Embed the value and associated staff development from reflective practice.*

Fiona Duncan's diverse professional journey, from residential childcare to the ambulance service and further education, reflects her commitment to supporting vulnerable individuals. Her early experiences with care-experienced young people fuelled a passion to return to the sector, where she currently advocates for exemplary staff learning and development. Believing that well-trained professionals are crucial for positive outcomes, Fiona focuses on equipping staff with the necessary skills to effectively support the complex needs of care-experienced children and young people.

Stephanie Hillman brings eleven years of experience to the field of residential childcare. Her career has included a significant period within Psychological Services, demonstrating her adaptability and resilience in navigating various challenges and organisational shifts. As a leader, Stephanie is deeply committed to fostering growth within her team. She actively seeks and values training and development opportunities, recognising their importance in empowering team members to excel and advance in their professional roles. Her leadership approach emphasises the continuous improvement of skills and knowledge, creating a supportive environment for professional development



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10 NOVEMBER 15.45-17.15 | DOWNSTAIRS 1

Creating a Workforce with Compassion Resilience and Well-being

Emma Harding

Youth Care and social service organizations experience an average of 20-40% turnover rates annually. This is significantly higher than the for-profit sector. A 2020 study conducted and published by Forbes Magazine reported that 45% of non-profit employees planned to change jobs within the next five years and over half planned to leave the social service or non-profit sector entirely. There are many contributing factors to these staggering statistics, one of the most alarming is an estimated 50% of workers are either experiencing burnout or experiencing warning signs of future burnout. For those working in human or social services and mental health care fields, burnout can often be accompanied by secondary trauma, a combination frequently referred to as compassion fatigue. Many professionals are more prone to compassion fatigue and may fall victim to the myth that it is simply part of the job.

As leaders in youth care and social service organizations, it is our responsibility to understand the underlying causes of compassion fatigue, how to recognize it, and proactive ways to protect our valuable workforce from compassion fatigue and the impact it has on the well-being of not only the employee, but also the young people and families they serve. This presentation will provide leaders at all levels within an organization with a working knowledge of burnout, secondary trauma, and the resulting symptoms of compassion fatigue. Leaders will be introduced to a framework of well-being and resilience that can guide organizational practices including onboarding, supervision, team management, and even help to navigate discipline and crisis.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Identify key factors of burnout and compassion fatigue in the field of youth care.*
- *Utilize Indicators of Wellbeing to assess and build compassion resilience within their organization.*
- *Implement learn helpful tools for onboarding and supervision practices enhance their ability to support employee well-being and resilience.*

Emma Harding is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) and Director of Learning at the Meraki Institute. With extensive experience in school-based therapeutic services, she has worked with children and families from early childhood through college, adapting her approach to the developmental needs of each stage. Emma believes that every individual's story holds the potential for growth, healing, and transformation. Specializing in advanced play therapy techniques, Emma is particularly dedicated to supporting families and children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As a committed educator and lifelong learner, she emphasizes collaboration and practical strategies to help therapists, educators, and trainees foster trauma-sensitive, supportive environments. In her personal life, Emma enjoys spending time outdoors, creating new adventures with her daughters, and being with family and friends.



10 NOVEMBER 15.45-17.15 | DOWNSTAIRS 2

The Educational Path to a Relationally-Oriented Professional Support Workforce in the USA

Katherine Raynor, Kathryn Hunter and Mette Christiansen, PhD

The Concentration in Human Services (CHS) is a comprehensive educational program that has focused on professionalizing the direct support workforce in the United States through relational practice for more than 30 years. Unlike clinicians, direct support workers often spend the most time with individuals seeking support, but they do so without any formal educational requirements or preparation. The lack of an educated direct support workforce has devastating consequences for people receiving support and the workers themselves, who are left underpaid and overworked. Founded on the Danish model of social pedagogy, the CHS socializes the students for relational practice through its deliberate pedagogy inside and outside the classroom. In this session, three CHS faculty will share strategies, challenges, and successes in fostering a program which consistently graduates well-educated, human rights oriented, and capable professionals who bring strong relational practices into their work and are leaders in advocating for much needed change.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *A call for the professionalization of direct support workers - a new profession!*
- *An overview of human services and child and youth care in the USA, including confronting myths and misconceptions.*
- *Strategies for implementing relational practice in educational settings through an example of a successful program founded on social pedagogy in the USA.*

Katherine Raynor, LMSW is dedicated to the caring professions, and draws heavily on models of community development and social pedagogy in her practice. This has included providing preventative education around dating violence and healthy relationships to teenagers, using strengths-based nurturing parenting interventions with families at risk of child abuse and neglect, and international youth development in El Salvador and Malawi as a volunteer with the US Peace Corps. She is proud to currently be the Director of the Concentration in Human Services at SUNY New Paltz where she can help guide and support the next generation of professionals providing social care.

Katie Hunter is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and experienced educator and social worker specializing in relational care, supervision, and child welfare. She teaches at SUNY New Paltz. Katie brings over 15 years of interdisciplinary experience across social work, residential care, and higher education. She maintains a private clinical practice and is committed to trauma-informed, anti-oppressive approaches. A passionate advocate for equity and systemic change, Katie integrates social pedagogy and reflective practice into her teaching and leadership. She is also an active member of National Association of Social Work and multiple community initiatives.

Mette Christiansen, PhD educated as a social pedagogue in Denmark and a social worker in the USA, has worked with people across the life-span. From 1997 until her retirement in 2024, Mette was teaching in the Concentration in Human Services at the State University of New York at New Paltz and was its director from 2003. Mette also taught International Social Welfare and Social Development courses in a variety of countries. Areas of research and professional interests include introduction of social pedagogy in the US; professionalization and educational socialization of human services and social workers; and international social welfare/development.

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10 NOVEMBER 15.45-17.15 | UPSTAIRS

Bridges Not Barriers

Ziigwanbinesii Charles

As CYC practitioners we need to understand that we do not know it all. Entering with humility and accountability sets the foundation for connection in relational practice. It levels the playing field - to be human to human – and meet folks in a genuine way. Throughout this workshop we will share stories of practice, highlighting the journey of learning and transformation. We aim to cultivate a space of engagement and reflection.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Exploring the tension between connection vs compliance.*
- *Valuing mistakes as core parts of our learning.*
- *Exploring the importance of presence & reflective practice*

Aurora De Monte is a CYC practitioner and educator based in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough, Ontario). Aurora is currently working on a PhD focusing on relational teaching and is a co-editor of the journal of Relational Child and Youth Care Practice. Aurora continues to practice supporting young people and families in a variety of capacities in the community.

Ziigwanbinesii Charles is mukwa ndoodem (bear clan) from Mnjikaning, Chippewas of Rama First Nation on Treaty 20 currently known as Ontario, situated on Turtle Island otherwise known as 'Canada.' Ziigwanbinesii is an active community helper, educator, adviser, and advocate. Ziigwanbinesii is a proud Child and Youth Care Practitioner who is passionate about strengthening young people's identity, purpose, and community connections. Ziigwanbinesii currently is working in child welfare, supporting to re-define, reimagine equitable and culturally informed care with the ultimate goals being intergenerational healing, autonomy, self-governance, and healthier communities.



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10 NOVEMBER 16.30-17.15 | MAIN HALL

Relational Systems: Rehumanising Stories

Stephanie Hunter

The systems which support children and families particularly children in care can be pressured and stressful. In my consultancy work I find some of the supervision, and consultation relates to rehumanising staff. Supporting them in supervision helping them reflect and make meaning of lives and living experiences. To then effectively support cared for children. Consultancy work is similar. With permission we will share working relationally and reducing “them and us” with relational services.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *A Relational supervision.*
- *Making meaning from lived and living experience.*
- *The power of connective relationships.*

Stephanie Hunter Dip S/W, BA, BSC, MA qualified in social work in 1997. From 2002 to 2012 she set up and managed multi award winning mental health services for cared for and adopted children. She is also a therapist specialising in attachment and trauma responsive practice. Stephanie spent several years as a higher education senior lecturer and during this time began publishing in relation to cared for children, mental health and self-care. A forthcoming publication is due in relation to lived experience. She has presented nationally and internationally and received funding from Social Work England to make a film based on original research. Stephanie currently works as a Social work consultant and delivers training, supervision and consultancy. She is also trained as an independent reviewer of child safeguarding practice reviews. She also provides supervision nationally to children's homes groups.



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KEYNOTE

11 NOVEMBER 9.45-10.30 | MAIN HALL

Our History of Hating Children: Time to Rethink Who We are and What We Do

Dr Grant Charles

While we come from societies that loudly profess that we love children there is a significant mismatch between what we say and how we treat young people. This is particularly the case for children who have been marginalized in any way. This has held true historically and does so currently. While we in child and youth care like to celebrate our work as champions of young people our history doesn't quite support our view. Using my country of Canada as an example, I will trace the history of how we have treated young people in state care and who come under state jurisdiction to the current era. While my examples will be Canadian what we discuss could apply to many jurisdictions. We will discuss how the origins and foundations of child and youth care have adversely impacted children and look for new ways we can work towards a system of care that works for everyone.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Foundational History of CYC;*
- *Adverse Intervention Outcomes;*
- *A New Future for CYC.*

Grant Charles is an Associate Professor in the School of Social Work and an affiliated faculty member with the Division of Adolescent Health and Medicine with the Faculty of Medicine at the University of British Columbia. He is affiliated with the UBC Centre for the Study of Services to Children and Families. He is a member of the Prato International Collaborative on Family Mental Health and the Long Shadow of War International Collaborative. He is an associate member of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and an adjunct professor in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. He was a core team member for the Anti-Indigenous Racism in the British Columbia Health Care System Inquiry and a co-author of *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C. Health Care*. He has also served as an advisor to the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nations working on jurisdictional negotiations for the reparation of child and family services from the federal and provincial governments.



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PLENARY

11 NOVEMBER 10.30-11.15 | MAIN HALL

Practice What You Teach: Using Relational Praxis to Lead Collective Care in Faculty-Faculty Relationships

Jessica Williams and K. Larisa Hanssen

As faculty and new coordinators within the Child and Youth Care (CYC) and Youth Justice (YJ) programs, we are energized and motivated to deepen our inquiries into relational praxis within the higher education (HE) context – exploring the nuances in the often-overlooked sphere of faculty-faculty relationships.

Through a qualitative analysis of our semi-structured and regular journaling of our experiences as new leaders within HE, we examine how collective care and trust is enacted within our own departmental communities. In our teaching, we emphasize to students the significance of trust and care in their work with children, youth, and families; yet one must ask – can these teachings be meaningful if we are not actively modeling and leading these relational values within our own professional circles in HE? In this session, we will share actionable insights from our collective experience to highlight the value of relational praxis and modeling in non-hierarchical HE teams, aiming to inspire peers in similar leadership roles.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Ideas and suggestions for leading faculty-to-faculty relational engagement;*
- *Building mutual trust and collective care within a faculty team;*
- *Expectations and realities of leading without hierarchy.*

Jessica Williams (she/her/hers) is a coordinator and instructor with the Child and Youth Care (CYC) program and the Youth Justice (YJ) program at Douglas College in Coquitlam, BC, Canada. In addition to her role as an instructor, she is in private practice as a Registered Social Worker (RSW) and works with the local health authority as a clinician in an outpatient psychiatric program for children and youth who are experiencing acute mental health crises. Jessica is passionate about therapeutic relationships, mental health care for children, youth, and families, and working within multidisciplinary environments to enhance teaching, learning and pedagogical partnerships.

K. Larisa Hanssen (she/her/hers) is a co-ordinator of the Youth Justice (YJ) program and an instructor in both the Child and Youth Care (CYC) program and Youth Justice (YJ) program at Douglas College (Canada). Larisa is also a private consultant working with health authorities and non-profit organizations in project development, staff training, and program evaluation. Prior to stepping into the world of academia, Larisa spent 25 years working alongside young people and their families across Canada and in Australia in a variety of settings including community-based youth housing programs, outreach, child welfare, youth justice, and psychiatric care.



11 NOVEMBER 11.30-12.15 | MAIN HALL

Supporting Families to Heal from Within

Shay Fulham, Colette Heerey and Siobhan Crosby

Helping children move from a position of vulnerability and risk within their own homes to one of safety and security requires skilled, purposeful intervention with their parent or primary carer—and sometimes with the child themselves. This session explores the core principles of community-based family support work with vulnerable children and their families. Drawing on real-world case studies, it illustrates the powerful impact that sustained family support in the community can have.

The presentation is grounded in the extensive experience of *Meath Springboard Family Support Services*, whose team has been delivering community-based support for over 25 years.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Modelling positive relationships is essential to helping families heal from within.*
- *Hope is the foundation for meaningful change.*
- *The capacity and desire to change are crucial precursors to personal and family growth.*

Colette Heerey brings over 30 years of experience working with children and parents to foster nurturing, caring home environments. In her daily practice, she translates social care theory into positive outcomes through relational work with families experiencing neglect or welfare concerns.

Siobhan Crosby began her career as a residential social care worker before transitioning into her current role as a community-based Family Support Worker—where she has thrived for the past 26 years. While the social landscape has evolved during her career, the core importance of authentic professional relationships remains unchanged and is evident throughout her work.

Shay (Sé) Fulham has dedicated 40 years to working with and for young people. From his early days as a youth worker on street corners to his time in residential care settings and now as the leader of a community-based family support service since 2006, Sé has been a tireless innovator. His practice is anchored in the belief that relationships are central to healing and change.



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11 NOVEMBER 11.30-13.00 | DOWNSTAIRS 1

Fragments of Unsettling: A Collective Zine on Relational Practice

Jill Thompson, Maureen Cullen and Chelan McCallion

This interactive workshop explores how we reimagine post-secondary education in Child and Youth Care Counsellor (CYCC) and Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) degree programs through relational, anti-oppressive, and decolonizing pedagogies. Drawing from our interdisciplinary practices—Feminist New Materialism (FNM), ungrading, labour-based grading, and experiential learning—we examine how neoliberal and colonial logics shape ECE and CYCC preparation and propose alternative approaches grounded in care, community, and discomfort as pedagogy. Participants will engage in reflective dialogue, experiential activities, and zine-making to explore what it means to unsettle traditional educational practices. We will co-create a collective zine—Fragments of Unsettling—as an artifact of shared memory, resistance, and possibility. This session invites critical inquiry into how relational learning and leadership can transform professional education into spaces that honour complexity, centre diverse knowledges, and resist compliance-based models. Participants will leave with tools, questions, and creative inspiration for building ethical and courageous learning environments.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Participants will critically reflect on how their classrooms or professional practices may reproduce dominant norms (e.g., neoliberalism, colonialism) and explore relational, anti-oppressive alternatives.*
- *Participants will engage in experiential activities—including collective zine-making—to explore how discomfort, care, and creativity can function as pedagogical tools for unsettling professional education.*
- *Participants will leave with practical strategies and inspiration for transforming post-secondary or professional learning spaces into ethical, community-rooted environments that honour diverse ways of knowing and being. This presentation is a collaboration between students and instructors from the Child and Youth Care (CYC) program at Douglas College (British Columbia, Canada).*

Jill Thompson is an Assistant Professor in the Bachelor of Child Studies- Child and Youth Care Counsellor program at Mount Royal University. Jill is also a registered psychologist focusing on topics related to gender and sexuality and has presented many workshops on these topics. As a queer, neurodiverse human trying to navigate the world of academia, Jill tries to bring both a CYCC and anti-oppressive practice to the classroom.

Maureen Cullen is an Assistant Professor in the Bachelor of Child Studies- Early Learning and Child Care program at Mount Royal University. Maureen is a Registered Early Childhood Educator and researcher focusing on relational pedagogies, common worlds pedagogies and multi-species ethnography to unsettle taken-for-granted assumptions in early learning and child care settings. Maureen draws on these pedagogies and practices to create conditions for students to experiment with multiple ways of knowing to unsettle dominant neoliberal discourses in the post-secondary classroom.

Chelan McCallion is an Assistant Professor at Mount Royal University with over 17 years of experience in the human services sector. Her work has centered on the transition of young adults from therapeutic campus-based care, with a focus on Youth Transition to Adulthood (YTA) and vocational programming. Her research examines student well-being through the lens of mental health, the influence of indoor green spaces, and shared emotional experiences of awe and collective effervescence. In the classroom, she emphasizes equity and engagement through inclusive teaching practices and alternative forms of assessment, including labour-based grading.

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11 NOVEMBER 11.30-13.00 | DOWNSTAIRS 2

Embedding Relational Practice in Organizational Culture

Michelle Holbrook and Andy Leggett

This presentation will explore the integration of relational practice into organizational culture, focusing on its definition, implementation strategies, and impact. Relational practice, vital for fostering effective communication and supportive relationships within teams, is defined and its relevance to organizational dynamics discussed. Leadership's pivotal role in cultural transformation is emphasized, including top-down messaging, securing board buy-in, and establishing reinforcing systems like debriefing and team meetings.

The benefits and challenges of adopting a relational approach are examined, with strategies provided for overcoming obstacles. Lessons learned and best practices from Sarnia-Lambton Rebound's experience underscore the importance of progress and celebration throughout the process. Methods for measuring progress and assessing effectiveness are detailed, highlighting the ongoing evaluation necessary for successful implementation.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Define relational practice in regard to organizational culture;*
- *Difference of developing a relationship and being in relationship;*
- *Define the leadership roles in cultural transformation;*
- *Explore benefits and challenges of adopting a relational approach organizationally;*
- *Discuss the practical implementation;*
- *Overview of the lessons learned.*

Michelle Holbrook is a Child and Youth Care (CYC) professional and Executive Director of Sarnia-Lambton Rebound, an organization committed to empowering youth through innovative programs and support. With over two decades of experience in the field, Michelle is passionate about fostering resilience, growth, and well-being in young people. Michelle prioritizes collaboration, relational practice and youth engagement to support youth success.

Andy Leggett is the CEO of Transformative Relational Consultation and Training (TRCT). He is also the CEO of Kalon Services, an agency providing family-based care and staff-modelled services in Ontario and Newfoundland. A proud Child and Youth Care Practitioner for over 45 years, Andy has been providing training and consultation to agencies and organizations across Canada and internationally.



12 NOVEMBER 14.00-15.30 | DOWNSTAIRS 1

Leading to Excellence: Not Settling for ‘Just Good Enough’

Frank Delano, LMSW

There are many dynamics in our society, and in our helping professions, that create a strong need for supervisors and leaders at all levels of an organization to be very competent managers. These dynamics might be things like shortage of staff, budget cuts, an elevated level of recording responsibility etc. If not careful these pressures can lead to some settling for services "just good enough". To reach a level of true excellence competent managers must also develop and display excellent leadership qualities and a willingness to make tough decisions. This highly interactive workshop is intended for highly motivated people who are willing to critically think and want to strive for excellence in the services our children and families deserve. Using the presenter's unique "coaching style" of training this highly interactive workshop will be present strategies for excellence in our work and create a forum for collaborative learning through critical-thinking discussions.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Participants will be learn a general definition of ‘excellence’ in our field and be able to articulate excellence as it applies to their own program/work.*
- *Participants will be able to identify at least five things that work against a leader striving for excellence.*
- *Participants will create a ‘mini-action plan’ with three areas they will commit to work on in their practice to push from good to excellent.*

Frank Delano, LMSW is the President of Professional Package Consulting. He previously worked at a large New York Residential Center for 25 years beginning as a direct-service Child Care Worker. He taught for 25 years in the Fordham University Graduate Social Work program and teaches Child Welfare for the University of Oklahoma for the last 18 years. He is on the Board of ACYCP and was on the Committee that revised the last CWLA Standards of Excellence for Children's Residential Care in America. He has presented at the last 6 Unity Conferences and has presented at numerous National and International Conferences.



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11 NOVEMBER 12.15-13.00 | MAIN HALL

Relational Leading Through Transformative Learning in CYC Education

Thais Costa Rabelo Amorim

This presentation explores how transformative learning can serve as a foundation for relational leadership within Child and Youth Care (CYC) education. Drawing from my teaching experiences in courses such as CYC 280 and CYC 296, I highlight how co-created learning environments foster mutual accountability, empathy, and critical engagement. By centring trauma-informed and anti-oppressive pedagogies, I aim to create psychologically safe classrooms that acknowledge students lived realities while encouraging intellectual risk-taking and growth. My approach includes flipped classrooms, co-constructed assessments, and the integration of student voices in shaping curriculum—practices that disrupt traditional hierarchies and model relational leadership in action. I also draw on my legal and policy background to bridge systemic analysis with relational care, inviting students to critically engage with legislation, policy, and ethics through a social justice lens. Together, these strategies support the development of culturally responsive, reflective, and equity-oriented practitioners who are prepared to lead and learn in challenging times.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Define core elements of transformative learning and explain how they contribute to relational leadership in post-secondary education.*
- *Identify trauma-informed and anti-oppressive strategies that support safe and inclusive learning environments.*
- *Explore concrete examples of student-centred pedagogies—such as flipped classrooms and co-constructed assessments—that foster shared responsibility and critical engagement.*
- *Reflect on how integrating policy and legal analysis into classroom practice can enhance students' systemic awareness and ethical decision-making.*
- *Consider how these approaches can be adapted to their own teaching contexts to better prepare students to lead with care, integrity, and equity.*

Thais Amorim (she/her) is a Brazilian educator, scholar, and practitioner committed to relational, transformative, and equity-centered approaches in the field of Child and Youth Care. Her teaching is grounded in care ethics, Indigenous and decolonial perspectives, and praxis-based learning that bridges theory with lived experience. She designs inclusive, participatory learning environments that invite students to think critically, engage deeply, and co-create knowledge in community. Thais brings extensive experience in policy, mental health, and youth advocacy into the classroom, and her pedagogy centres the voices and contributions of Canadian, Indigenous, and BIPOC scholars. Her current research explores paid practicum models, transformative curriculum design, and pathways for embedding wellness, critical literacy, and relational practice across post-secondary programs. Outside of the classroom, Thais is a proud Brazilian daughter, sister, and wife, and the devoted human to a spirited Yorkie named Isla. She finds joy in baking, slow mornings, and spending time with her husband and family. She is continually inspired by her family's resilience, her students' brilliance, and the communities she learns with on Stó:lō territory.

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11 NOVEMBER 14.00-14.45 | MAIN HALL

Paws (Pause) for Hope

Kirsten Hargreaves

This interactive and reflective workshop will explore how hope theory connects to working with young people as a form of relational practice. As we continue to emerge from the covid pandemic, young people have been deeply impacted with mental health concerns at an all-time high across the globe. Through the introduction of hope theory, this workshop will illuminate stories of hope and motivation as well as invite participants to reflect on the ways in which they find and maintain hope in challenging times. Whether you are new to this approach or already incorporating it into your practice, this session will provide practical strategies, deepen connections, and spark curiosity.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Introduction of Snyder's Hope Theory as a relational framework in CYC.*
- *Stories of hope in practice illuminated with young people through animal included activities.*
- *Invitation to reflect on one's own ways of accessing, cultivating and maintaining hope in challenging times.*

Kirsten Hargreaves is a Registered Clinical Counsellor with the British Columbia Association of Clinical Counsellors and an Assistant Professor in the Child Youth and Family Studies Department at the University of the Fraser Valley in British Columbia, Canada. Kirsten specializes in child and youth mental health with children ages 3-12 focusing in canine, nature based and play included counselling as well as animal included supervision and consultation. Kirsten has partnered with her two golden retrievers for the past ten years as a canine assisted intervention specialist across therapeutic and community domains. Kirsten is an internationally recognized speaker and a recent TEDTalk presenter.



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11 NOVEMBER 14.00-14.45 | DOWNSTAIRS 1

Social Justice Action as Part of Relational Practice in the Child and Youth Care Classroom

Yvonne Gomez

Relational practice and social justice are deeply interconnected. Both emphasize the importance of human connection, dignity, the recognition of power and inequity in society. This workshop will showcase two examples of how our CYC program is beginning to bring in social justice explicitly into the curriculum. First, the CYC program student orientation we do a piece of shared learning through a commitments activity that introduces social justice. This collective action brings our students together from day one and has a relational impact on how we practice with each other as peers, faculty, and members of a wider community. Second, our Faculty at Douglas College has committed to incorporating participation in community actions such as the Women's March in Vancouver Canada (the focuses on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls).

This workshop will close with an interactive discussion on centering edu-action and the tension of participating in social justice movements at this time in history, and how to work it into curriculum while also prioritizing student voice. Social Justice provides a way to broaden our understanding of relational CYC practice and learning that offer a way to move beyond our work with individual young people and look at systemic injustices and practitioner responses through education.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Social Justice as Relational Practice in CYC education.*
- *Local responses for social change - locally, nationally and globally.*
- *Faculty and students working together with shared values, beliefs and the tension of academic settings.*

Yvonne Gomez, MSW - I am a faculty at Douglas College which is located on the unceded traditional and ancestral lands of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the ǵícǵy (Katzie), q'w̓a:ḥł'əḥ (Kwantlen), k'w̓ik'w̓əłəm (Kwikwetlem), x'w̓məθk'w̓əy̓əm (Musqueam), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), scəwəθən (Tsawwassen) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Peoples, in Coquitlam British Columbia Canada. I identify as a settler and come from the Treaty and Traditional Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and was raised by immigrant settlers from Spain. I have been at Douglas College as a Faculty and Program Coordinator in Child and Youth Care for 10 years.

11 NOVEMBER 14.00-14.45 | DOWNSTAIRS 1

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11 NOVEMBER 14.00-14.45 | DOWNSTAIRS 2

Aftercare Workers' Experiences of Mental Health Needs of Care Leavers: A Mixed Qualitative Methods Approach

Dr Elizabeth Noonan

Children in care are a vulnerable population who face many challenges, but few studies have examined the mental health needs of those who are exiting care. This session will report on a study carried out by the presenter and two colleagues (Dr Dermot O'Callaghan and Asst. Prof Barbara Hannigan) that sought to examine the mental health needs of care leavers as seen by the aftercare workers who work with them. Analysis found concerns around the care system, their individual circumstances, and various diagnoses.

Analysis of the research finding will be broken down into different ideal types: the resilient, the unable, the dysfunctional copier, and the disenchanted and implications discussed include how to work with care leavers within a mental health context.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *The mental health needs of the care leavers included client factors that were largely entwined in their histories that led them to the care system, the impact of the care system, and known mental health issues.*
- *There are various factors that could facilitate change for the mental health of care leavers, including government and interagency response, staffing considerations, and personal and social factors.*
- *We need to support calls for change when examining the mental health of those exiting care (as well as acknowledging the complexities of these young people and the systems they are intertwined with).*

Elizabeth Noonan is a counselling psychologist currently working for a Children in Care team in Tusla (Ireland). She completed this research for her doctorate dissertation at Trinity College Dublin in 2023. She is passionate about helping children and young people who have experienced trauma.



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11 NOVEMBER 14.00-14.45 | UPSTAIRS

Committing to Excellence - When Good Enough is Good Enough: A Community and Voluntary Perspective of Enough

David Power

The presentation will explore what is excellence, or what is good enough excellence in a complex world.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *The concept of doing no more harm.*
- *What does excellence really mean in terms of relationships and risk.*
- *What is the real picture of a changing landscape in residential care.*

David Power has a MA in Management, BA Hons Social Care, B A in Social Studies & National Certificate in Vocational Rehabilitation National Certificate Education & Equality- Level 8. He was President of the Irish Association Social Care Workers and part of the founding members of Social Care Ireland. He has represented the profession on the Health Social Care Professional Council for 8 years. With over 37 years' experience in social care which include The Children Detention Schools, The Crisis Interventions Service, Disability Services, Community Care HSE he is now the Director of Smyly Trust Service. Smyly Trust is a Therapeutic Community catering for young people aged 8 to 18.



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11 NOVEMBER 14.45-15.30 | MAIN HALL

My Story Through Care: A Pedagogical Experience

Derek Byrne and Adam Reidy

In this deeply personal and insightful session, a young person shares her journey through the Irish care system. From multiple foster placements to a transformative experience at *Tus Nua*, her story highlights the profound impact of relationship-based, person-centred care. Through her lived experience, she introduces us to the core values and everyday practices of **social pedagogy**—a model of care grounded in respect, trust, and shared humanity.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Relationships are Essential: Positive, authentic relationships between young people and adults are the foundation for trust, healing, and growth. At Tus Nua, shared living and mutual knowledge foster a sense of family and belonging.*
- *Language Matters: The way adults communicate—with inclusion, respect, and child-friendly language—deeply influences how young people feel about themselves and their place in the world. Even simple changes, like using “adult” instead of “staff,” can remove barriers and encourage connection.*
- *People are Important: Continuity of care, genuine empathy, and seeing a young person as more than their past is crucial. Paige reminds us that the worst kind of loneliness is feeling alone among people—and the best care begins with being fully present and human.*

Derek Byrne is CEO of Compass Child & Family Services. He has been with Compass for eleven years and has served as CEO for the past four. He was instrumental in the foundation of *Tus Nua* and in shaping its distinct model of care, rooted in social pedagogy and meaningful relationships.

Adam Reidy is House Pedagogue, *Tus Nua*, Compass Child & Family Services. Adam has shared a unique and long-standing relationship with this young person, having been her primary carer for six and a half years. His “live-in” role at *Tus Nua* is central to the home's model and reflects the key messages of this presentation: connection, consistency, and care.



11 NOVEMBER 14.45-15.30 | DOWNSTAIRS 1

Triggers and Tripwires: Navigating the Complexities of Consent vs Exposure in Social Care Education

John Byrne

The aim of this workshop is to explore the challenges and complexities of protecting Social Care / Child & Youth Care students from emotional trauma, while also exposing them to the realities of their work.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Question the effectiveness of current social care education and training regarding graduates' readiness to practice social care;*
- *Question the evolving narrative related to 'Trauma Informed Education';*
- *Explore a creative model of education and training that supports students to embrace and explore, rather than contain and avoid their vulnerabilities, so that they become 'resilient practitioners' who are not 'tripped up' or 'blind-sided' in practice.*

John Byrne is a social care worker and Lecturer in Social Care Practice at SETU in Waterford. He has over 30 years' experience in social care. He is also an accredited Humanistic/Integrative Counsellor/Psychotherapist in private practice.



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11 NOVEMBER 14.45-15.30 | DOWNSTAIRS 2

Helping Young People in Residential Care make Educational and Therapeutic progress: The Development of an Integrated, in-house Support Service

Dr Ronan Gibney

Ashdale Care is a leading provider of residential care for children in Ireland. To meet the complex needs of children with developmental trauma, Ashdale has developed the innovative Ashdale Learning Hub (ALH)—a dedicated therapeutic and educational support service. Grounded in trauma-informed, relationally led practice, ALH offers a safe, attachment-aware environment where teachers, occupational therapists, behaviour therapists, psychologists and art therapists work collaboratively. Their shared goal is to help children feel safe, learn to regulate emotions, develop trust and connection with others, improve social skills and re-engage with learning. ALH provides flexible, individualised therapeutic supports and learning opportunities through one-to-one and small group sessions, reducing the barriers to learning often faced by children in care. By enhancing self-esteem, confidence, and essential skills, the programme uses a therapeutically informed approach that supports academic achievement and successful reintegration into mainstream education. This presentation will highlight the interdisciplinary strategies employed and share examples of the educational, social and emotional growth observed in participating children

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *A well-designed, evidence-based model of Care/Therapeutic Support is essential for success*
- *Successful implementation requires an organisational approach*
- *Focusing on relationships, both internal and external, is the key to achieving meaning change and progress.*

Dr Ronan Gibney is a Clinical Psychologist with over 20 years' experience working with children and adults. He has worked as a clinical lead in both the public and private sectors and has developed and overseen the implementation of effective models of care and therapeutic support in a variety of community and residential settings.



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11 NOVEMBER 14.45-15.30 | UPSTAIRS

Strength in Experience, and how that transfers from Senior to Newer Practitioners and Students

Brian Hogan and Selenna Reilly

Selenna and Brian will open a discussion on their experiences of working with social care students and transferring their experiences through story to emerging professionals and future leaders. They will explore the two-way learning process and draw the movement between academic, practice and experience.

The session will be very interactive and lean on a lifetime of working in social care settings particularly secure detention facilities. They will explore the need to pass on the hard learned knowledge and how best to do this.

Drawing on the challenges in our current world and how these arrive in the milieu of social care environments and effect daily life for staff and young people, and indeed all who need the services that we offer.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *The power of mentoring.*
- *The value in interaction between experienced managers and newer practitioners and managers.*
- *How learning at its best is a two-way process.*

Brian Hogan is Director of Relationships-At-Work. He spent over 36 years working in the public sector, predominantly in secure residential care, twenty years of which was in senior management roles including five as CEO. He has been a member of the board in Don Bosco Care, the consortium for therapeutic communities, and the social care workers registration board. He is interested in team development, mentoring and providing a safe sounding board for leaders. He is available as an expert witness. He particularly enjoys working with emerging leaders in the colleges and in care settings of all sorts

Selenna Reilly is Programmes Manager in Oberstown Children Detention Campus, Lusk, Co Dublin. Over the last 26 years she has held various different role including Residential Social Care Worker, Unit Manager and Head of Programmes with responsibility for young people's placement planning. As Programmes Manager with Oberstown's Children's Detention Campus her main focus is to research, develop and ensure the delivery of a suite of evidenced based offending behaviour programmes and interventions which are aimed at changing the thinking, attitudes and behaviours that may lead young people to reoffend. She holds a BA in Social Care Practice from Dublin Institute of Technology. She has completed a Leadership and Development Programme in Dublin City University. Most recently she has engaged in training in the Seven Eyed Model of Supervision with Robin Shohet. Over the last two years Selenna has been involved in speaking with Social Care students throughout the colleges in Ireland to increase the awareness within the field of the work undertaken with young people in Oberstown.



ENDNOTE

11 NOVEMBER 15.45-16.45 | MAIN HALL

The Roots of Child and Youth Care in Residential Care

Dr Mark Smith

This is a field that has been buffeted in recent decades by allegations of abuse and, not unrelatedly, by demands for deinstitutionalisation. At a practice level, it is rarely a positive career choice anymore, while in academia, few big ideas or big names remain. Indeed, academia seems to have been taken over by contestable ideologies that offer little to practitioners to help them understand the complex and messy realities of practice. There are few voices speaking out for residential child care and those prepared to do so risk vilification. Yet, the need for residential care is not going to go away, despite the wishes of global NGOs. Failing to value the field is only going to make the experience of those placed there worse. This presentation will address all the above points, arguing that there is a need to be able to engage in robust debates around them.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *The push towards deinstitutionalisation of children's care services has impeded the development of residential child care.*
- *Globally, deinstitutionalisation is neither possible nor desirable.*
- *There is a need to reclaim some foundational messages from CYC history.*

Dr. Mark Smith is Professor in Social Work at the University of Dundee, Scotland. He worked in residential child care settings for almost 20 years before moving to academia. He has written extensively on residential child care. His work on care and upbringing is influenced by social theory and he has a particular interest in European models of social pedagogy.



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