



Rooted in Relational Practice, Rising in Relational Leadership

November 9-11, 2026

Bonnington Hotel, Dublin, Ireland

in association with





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Harmony



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Rooted in Relational Practice, Rising in Relational Leadership

Leadership in relational contexts requires sustained commitment. Building teams, developing morale, addressing workforce turnover, mentoring through example, and safeguarding relational values are ongoing and intentional tasks. As we become more experienced as practitioners and leaders, it is ever more apparent that there is a growing responsibility to ensure that hard-earned relational learning is:

- Preserved
- Remembered
- Adapted
- Reimagined
- Carried forward by emerging generations.

UNITY 2026 seeks to explore how we remain *rooted* in relational practice while *rising* into relational leadership.

Registration

Follow this [link](#) to register.

Accommodation

Accommodation and Conference Registration are booked separately.

Accommodation is booked with the Bonnington Hotel (the conference venue). There is single, double and triple occupancy availability. We have a special conference hotel rate (with access to the leisure facilities and pool) of:

- €130 Single room per night.
- €150 Twin / Double room per night.
- €195 Triple room per night.

To book accommodation at the conference venue, visit the [Bonnington Hotel web site](#) or phone + 353-1-8373544

For online booking, follow these steps:

1. Click **BOOK ONLINE**
2. **Select dates** and click **SEARCH**
3. Click on **CODE** and then enter **UNITY26**
4. Click **APPLY**.

Please ensure you have entered the correct number of guests.

Auction, in aid of CYC-Net

Unity 2026 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.



Programme-at-a-Glance

	Main Hall	Beaumont Room	Hampton Room	Collins Room
Monday 9 November 2026				
9.45	Registration and Opening			
10.00	PLENARY Dr. Heather Modlin and Dr. John Digney <i>Relational Leadership: Weaving Connection into Organisational Culture</i>			
11.00	BREAK			
11.30	Dr Jenny McGrath and Christine Pope (Canada) <i>Professional Identity, Language, and Leadership in CYC</i>	Michelle Holbrook, Christine Gaitens and Coura Niang (Canada) <i>Nothing Great Comes Easy: The Hard Work of Relational Leadership</i>	Dr Kelly Shaw (Canada) <i>Relational Leadership at the Edge: Sustaining Practice, Self, and Each Other in Complex Systems</i>	Soraya French and Florence Jansen (Scotland) <i>Bairns' Hoose as a Catalyst for System Wide Relational Change</i>
12.15				Stephanie McQuillan and Fiona Duncan (Scotland) <i>Weaving Relational Cultures, Practice and Values in Challenging Times</i>
13.00	LUNCH			
14.00	Dr. Heather Modlin and Lesley Goodyear (Canada) <i>What We Thought We Were Building: A Relational Leadership Plot Twist</i>	Dr. Stacy Kelsey (USA) <i>The Power of Mindful Learning to Transform Youth Programs</i>	Deb Cockerton and Heather Sago (Canada) <i>Innovator: Launching a CYCP- Aligned Career Beyond the System</i>	Dr. Rochelle Sharpe Lohrasbe and L. Marie Damgaard (Canada) <i>The Intelligence of Experience in Relational Practice</i>
14.45				Danah A. Williams (USA) <i>Holding Humanity Under Pressure</i>
15.30	BREAK			
15.45	Dr John Paul Fitzpatrick (Scotland) <i>We Cannot Lead What We Will Not Live: Relational Practice as Relational Leadership</i>			
16.30	END OF DAY 1			



AMAL YOUTH AND FAMILY CENTRE

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Programme-at-a-Glance

	Main Hall	Beaumont Room	Hampton Room	Collins Room
Tuesday 10 November 2026				
9.45	Registration and Opening			
10.00	PLENARY Jody Rhodes (USA) <i>Relational Leadership: Cultivating Program Participants into Staff and into the Fabric of the Agency</i>			
11.00	BREAK			
11.30	Anne Martin and Michelle Watson (Canada) <i>Creating a Circle of Compassion: Supporting Students with Trauma Histories</i>	Dr Michelle Briegel (Canada) <i>Relational Leadership: Building a Relational Supervision and Mentorship Model</i>	Delia Noel (Canada) <i>From the Mouth of Babes</i>	Brian Hogan (Ireland) <i>The Power of Relational Leadership in a Transactional World</i>
12.15				Breanna Bruns (Canada) <i>Reflecting on the Roots of Our Practice</i>
13.00	LUNCH			
14.00	Harrison Dax Nash (UK) <i>Connection, Reflection and Inspiration: Strategic leadership in CYC</i>	Kari Sisson (USA) and Kiaras Gharabaghi (Canada) <i>Relational Leadership in Action: Building Impactful Global Leadership in Child and Youth Care</i>	Marian Connell (Ireland) <i>Anchoring the Nervous System: Drawing on Visualisation, Art and Somatic Exercises to counteract stress and adversity</i>	Chukwuemeka Emmanuel Ordu (Australia) <i>Sustaining Relational Practice in Statutory Child Protection Systems: A Senior Practitioner Perspective</i>
14.45				Blair Semerak (Canada) <i>Burning Out, Burning Bridges, and the Art of Bouncing Back: The Life Cycles of a CYC</i>
15.30	BREAK			
15.45	Wendy Gee (Canada) <i>Relational Leadership in Action: Mentoring Emerging Leaders</i>			
16.30	END OF DAY 2			



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Programme-at-a-Glance

	Main Hall	Beaumont Room	Hampton Room	Collins Room
Wednesday 11 November 2026				
9.45	Registration and Opening			
10.00	PLENARY Dr Kiaras Gharabaghi (Canada) Philosophy, Law and Deep Care for Community: The Relational Leader			
11.00	BREAK			
11.30	Dr. Howard Bath (Australia) Accompaniment: The Heart of Relational Leadership	Audrey Moore (Ireland) Designing Relational Support Systems: Co-Creating a Framework for Workforce Sustainability	Dr Natasha Mahony and Simon Hogan (Ireland) Healing Environments: Implementing Trauma-Informed Care in Residential Care	Lorcan Gleeson and Dr. Ashleigh Best (Ireland) The Odyssey Saoirse Programme: From Environment to Experience – Embedding Relational Practice Through Sensory and Experiential Interventions in Residential Care
12.15		Eva Ihasz and Timea Teterják Sustainable Approaches in Family Strengthening: HiH Parenting Pilot Program	David Power (Ireland) Resilience and Empathy: A Social Care Story	Dr Varoshini Nadesan (South Africa) Risk and Resiliency Factors amongst Social Work Educators
13.00	LUNCH			
14.00	Danah A. Williams (USA) The Nervous System of a Relational Culture	Coenraad de Beer (Austria) Care Reform: An Opportunity to Strengthen Relational Child and Youth Care	Dr Rochelle Sharpe Lohrasbe and L. Marie Damgaard (Canada) Wayfinding in Relational Practice	Dr. Monica Pauls (Canada) Exploring a New Domain: Relational Practice and Technology
14.45			Dr. Niall Loftus and Kieran Hackett (Ireland) Bridging Worlds: Practicing Psychology within a Social Pedagogical Framework	Dr. Emmie Henderson-Dekort (Canada) Where are All the Youth Voices?
15.30	BREAK			
15.45	Closing Panel (International)			
16.30	END OF DAY 3			

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PLENARY

9 NOVEMBER 10.00-11.00 | MAIN HALL

Relational Leadership: Weaving Connection into Organisational Culture

Heather Modlin and John Digney

Relational practice is recognised as the foundation of effective work with children, young people, and families. Increasingly, however, it is also being understood as essential to leadership, supervision, and organisational culture. This plenary explores the emerging concept of *Relational Leadership*—an approach that extends the principles of relational practice beyond frontline interactions and into every level of an organisation.

Drawing on the work of Anglin's Interactional Dynamics, Kahn's concept of the functional caregiving organisation, and contemporary research on relational practice, supervision, and mentoring, this presentation demonstrates how relational values can shape leadership behaviours, decision-making, and organisational systems. Participants will be introduced to the concept of relational weaving and the 25 Relational Threads that underpin authentic, compassionate, and effective leadership.

Using practical examples and reflective insights, the session challenges traditional hierarchical models by proposing leadership that is grounded in trust, curiosity, empathy, integrity, shared responsibility, and purposeful connection. Rather than replacing existing leadership theories, Relational Leadership offers a complementary framework that strengthens organisational effectiveness by creating cultures where people feel safe, valued, empowered, and connected. Delegates will leave with practical ideas for embedding relational principles into leadership practice to enhance staff wellbeing, retention, collaboration, and ultimately, the quality of care and service delivery.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Understand the principles of Relational Leadership and how relational practice can be embedded across all levels of an organisation, from frontline practice to executive leadership.*
- *Explore the concept of relational weaving and the 25 Relational Threads as a practical framework for fostering trust, engagement, psychological safety, and organisational culture.*
- *Identify strategies for integrating relational values into leadership, supervision, and decision-making to strengthen staff wellbeing, organisational effectiveness, and quality of care.*

Dr. Heather Modlin has worked in the field of child and youth care for almost 40 years. She is currently CEO of Amal Youth and Family Centre in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. 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 International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net) and a board member of FICE Canada. Heather has a PhD in Child and Youth Care from the University of Victoria.

Dr. John M. Digney is an Irish psychotherapist, trainer, and child and youth care specialist with more than three decades of experience working with vulnerable children, young people, families, and practitioners. He is National Training and Learning Coordinator with Tusla – Ireland's Child and Family Agency, where he supports workforce development through education, consultation, and professional training. Dr. Digney has worked as a frontline practitioner, manager, clinician, and educator since the early 1990s, specialising in trauma-informed practice, therapeutic care, challenging behaviour, attachment, resilience, and relationship-based interventions. He holds professional qualifications in psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, coaching, psychology, management, facilitation, and adult education. Dr. Digney has authored, edited and co-authored a number of books, over 100 articles on relational practice and presented at conferences internationally for 20 years.

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9 NOVEMBER 11.30-13.00 | MAIN HALL

Professional Identity, Language, and Leadership in CYC

Jenny McGrath and Christine Pope

This session explores relational leadership in Child and Youth Care (CYC) practice through the interconnected concepts of language, identity, authenticity, congruence, and professional responsibility. Rooted in relational practice and informed by CYC frameworks, the session considers how leadership emerges not only through formal roles, but through the ways practitioners engage with self, others, and the evolving field. In CYC, leadership is relational, contextual, and grounded in authenticity.

The session invites reflection on how the field has been shaped by those who came before us and how these histories continue to influence contemporary practice and future directions in CYC. Together, participants will explore how language informs professional identity, connection, and relational practice.

Drawing on relational and reflective approaches within CYC, the session creates space to consider how leadership is nurtured through everyday interactions, ethical presence, mentorship, and collective responsibility. Ultimately, the session asks how we foster the next generation of relational leaders while remaining grounded in the values that continue to shape the field.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Critically reflect on how language, identity, authenticity, and congruence shape relational leadership and professional identity within Child and Youth Care practice.*
- *Explore how the histories, values, and relational foundations of the CYC field continue to influence contemporary practice, ethical responsibility, and future directions for leadership.*
- *Identify relational and reflective approaches that support the development of leadership through everyday practice, mentorship, ethical presence, and collective responsibility within CYC contexts.*

Christine Pope is a certified Child and Youth Care Practitioner focused on experiential and activity-based approaches in her work. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Child and Youth Care at MacEwan University in Edmonton, AB with a focus on community engaged learning and field education.

Jenny McGrath, PhD, 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.



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9 NOVEMBER 11.30-13.00 | BEAUMONT

Nothing Great Comes Easy: The Hard Work of Relational Leadership

Michelle Holbrook, Christine Gaitens and Coura Niang

This presentation explores the reality that relational leadership is meaningful, impactful, and transformative, but it is also deeply challenging work. In youth-serving organizations, leaders are often asked to balance operational demands, accountability measures, and organizational outcomes while simultaneously building authentic, trusting relationships with staff and the people they serve. Relational leadership requires leaders to move away from traditional models rooted in authority, hierarchy, and control, and instead embrace collaboration, vulnerability, emotional intelligence, and shared growth.

Using practical examples from onboarding, staff support, conflict navigation, community engagement and organizational culture-building, this presentation will highlight how relational leadership is not the “easy” leadership approach, but it is the intentional and ongoing work of showing up consistently, building trust over time, and remaining present alongside staff through both success and struggle. Referencing multiple organizational, cultural and sectoral contexts, participants will leave with a deeper understanding of why relational practice matters, why it can feel difficult to sustain, and how investing in relationships ultimately strengthens teams, organizational culture, and long-term outcomes.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Recognize the importance of intentional onboarding in building a relational workplace culture.*
- *Examine the shift from traditional authority-based leadership to collaborative relational leadership.*
- *Identify the emotional intelligence and intentional effort required to sustain relational leadership while balancing organizational demands.*

Michelle Holbrook, CYC-P, BSC, MACP is a published author and Child and Youth Care professional with over twenty-five years of experience supporting young people. As Executive Director of Sarnia-Lambton Rebound, she champions relational leadership, collaboration, and authentic youth engagement. Michelle is dedicated to fostering resilience, growth, and well-being in youth through innovative, strengths-based practice.

Christine Gaitens, MSc, CYC-P, RSW, brings over 30 years of direct care and leadership experience in Child and Youth Care across Ottawa and Toronto. Director of Transformative Relational Consultation and Training and part-time educator at Algonquin College, she is co-editor of *Relational Child & Youth Care in Action* and a published author. A former President of OACYC and was previously the Co-Chair of CYC-Net Canada, Christine received OACYC's Career Achievement Award in 2023.

Coura Niang, BACYC, M.ADS, BCBA, RBA. (Ont) is a Children's Mental Health Clinician, Professor at Humber Polytechnic, and President of the Ontario Association of Child and Youth Care. With expertise spanning applied behaviour analysis, disability studies, and child welfare, Coura is a passionate advocate for equity, inclusion, and the advancement of the Child and Youth Care profession.



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9 NOVEMBER 11.30-13.00 | HAMPTON

Relational Leadership at the Edge: Sustaining Practice, Self, and Each Other in Complex Systems

Kelly Shaw

Relational leadership is often framed as an ideal, yet it unfolds within systems that are stretched, under-resourced, and at times in tension with relational values. This workshop examines what it means to enact relational leadership in these conditions.

Drawing on extensive practice, teaching, and counselling experience, the session positions relational leadership as something lived in moments of uncertainty, ethical tension, and competing demands. It emphasizes the capacity to remain present, reflexive, and accountable within relationships, particularly when this is most challenging.

Participants will engage in practice-based scenarios and guided reflection focused on mentoring emerging practitioners, navigating intergenerational dynamics, and sustaining relational cultures in complex environments. Grounded in relational Child and Youth Care, trauma-informed practice, and reflexive ethical decision-making, the session offers both conceptual framing and practical application.

Participants will be invited to consider not only what relational leadership looks like, but what it requires, what sustains it, and how it is carried forward across generations.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Critically examine how relational leadership is enacted within complex systems that are resource constrained.*
- *Apply reflexive relational decision-making with intentional use of self in leadership and supervision contexts.*
- *Identify strategies for mentoring emerging practitioners while sustaining relational practice across generations.*

Kelly Shaw PhD RCT (c) CCC CYC-P has worked with children, youth, and families for over 30 years. She teaches in the Child and Youth Care program at Nova Scotia Community College. Her work focuses on relationships, supporting new practitioners, and decolonizing preservice CYC education.



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9 NOVEMBER 11.30-12.15 | COLLINS

Bairns' Hoose as a Catalyst for System Wide Relational Change

Soraya French and Florence Jansen

This workshop will take participants on the journey of developing and implementing Bairns' Hoose in the Outer Hebrides in Scotland, demonstrating how it has acted as a catalyst for system wide change within a multi agency setting. The session will explore how Bairns' Hoose enabled partners to move beyond a single service model and embed relational practice across children's services.

Central to this journey is the development of our Integrated Philosophy of Care, a shared framework applied across service partners to create consistent, values led practice. The framework emphasises love and kindness, developmental responsiveness, strengths based and relational practice, ecological awareness, and trauma informed support.

Participants will gain insight into how this approach supports collaboration, aligns with GIRFEC, SHANARRI and The Promise, and drives cultural change. The workshop will encourage reflection on how similar relational frameworks can be developed and sustained in other settings.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Describe what the Integrated Philosophy of Care means within the Outer Hebrides context and how its values intertwine and shall continue to shape localised children's services.*
- *Explain how the Integrated Philosophy of Care was embedded into the Western Isles Bairns' Hoose model, including the adaptations that make it culturally and geographically specific.*
- *Assess what a multi-agency approach looks like in practice by examining what has been achieved so far and identifying priorities for future collaborative development.*

Soraya French is a Child Protection Coordinator with experience supporting children and young people. Originally a secondary school teacher, retrained as children's and family's social worker, moving to children's residential home as team leader.

Florence Jansen is a Policy Officer for Children's Services and brings a background in independent advocacy and further and higher education student support. Her current work focuses on implementing Bairns' Hoose, supporting trauma-informed, rights-based responses for children and young people through policy, practice development.

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9 NOVEMBER 12.15-13.00 | COLLINS

Weaving Relational Cultures, Practice and Values in Challenging Times

Stephanie McQuillan and Fiona Duncan

This session is designed to immerse participants in the rich, forty-year history of the Moore House Group, enabling them to fully grasp the foundational historical and cultural context that shaped the organisation's core identity. By understanding the managing director's original vision, which encompasses Care, Education, Fostering, Psychology, and the Jane Moore Trust charity, participants will gain insight into the enduring values that govern current practices. The session will then transition to an in-depth analysis of how these established values are currently manifested across the Group's diverse service offerings. Finally, a critical evaluation will be undertaken to assess the profound influence of this deep-rooted culture on the ethical values, distinctive leadership styles, and day-to-day professional practice of the newest and emerging generations of staff members throughout the Moore House Group.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Understand the forty-year history and the Managing Director's original vision for the Group—including Care, Education, Fostering, Psychology, and the Jane Moore Trust—to evaluate how this deep-rooted culture continues to shape the ethical values and professional practice of emerging staff generations.*
- *Critically analyse how the Group's foundational values and distinctive identity are manifested in current relational leadership styles and day-to-day service delivery across the diverse offerings of the Moore House Group.*
- *Explore the synergy between your own personal values and the Group's enduring governing principles to successfully embed the organisation's core identity into your individual professional practice.*

Stephanie McQuillan is Head of Clinical Operations at Abercorn Clinic. Stephanie has over ten years of experience in Psychological Services within residential childcare, demonstrating adaptability. With a background in psychology and leadership, and postgraduate qualifications in counselling, she successfully established a private psychology clinic. Stephanie is committed to her team's growth, valuing continuous training and professional development to empower them to excel.

Fiona Duncan is Head of Training and Development at Moore House Group. Fiona's varied background, spanning childcare, the ambulance service, and education, underscores her dedication to vulnerable individuals. Driven by early experiences, she returned to the care sector to champion exceptional staff learning and development, believing that well-trained professionals are key to achieving positive outcomes for care-experienced young people.



Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Ag Obair Còmhla Airson nan Eilean

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9 NOVEMBER 14.00-15.30 | MAIN HALL

What We Thought We Were Building: A Relational Leadership Plot Twist

Heather Modlin and Lesley Goodyear

We set out to build cultures rooted in care, trust, and relational leadership. But here's the plot twist: some of what we were reinforcing wasn't growth, it was comfort.

In this candid and hopefully thought-provoking session, we explore the gap between intention and impact in relational practice. Drawing on our work across a variety of child and youth care organizations, we reflect on how our commitment to "holding space" and leading with care unintentionally enabled patterns of avoidance, over-accommodation, and resistance to change – both for us and for our staff. Grounded in our ongoing work with Dr. William Kahn and informed by Kurt Lewin's model of change, we will explore why discomfort is so often avoided in relational systems and what it actually takes to move toward more honest, accountable, and growth-oriented ways of being. Attendees will be invited into honest reflection and practical exploration, as well as provided an opportunity to gain some new language, tools, and insight. Together, we will challenge the pull toward comfort and consider what it means to create cultures where care and challenge coexist and where people are supported not just to feel safe, but to grow.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *A reality check on relational leadership — what it looks like when care quietly turns into avoidance, and how to shift it.*

Dr. Heather Modlin has worked in the field of child and youth care for almost 40 years. She is currently CEO of Amal Youth and Family Centre in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. 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 International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net) and a board member of FICE Canada. Heather has a PhD in Child and Youth Care from the University of Victoria.

Lesley Goodyear has worked in the child and youth care field for the past 20 plus years. She is currently the Manager of Family Engagement with Amal Youth and Family Centre. Lesley is known for her passion and commitment to working with families. She has worked in a variety of areas in the CYC field including group care, family support, residential treatment, and even providing family-based care to children in her own home. She is currently a facilitator of TBRI, TCI and Person Brain training and an avid student of developmental and growth culture practice.



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9 NOVEMBER 14.00-15.30 | BEAUMONT

The Power of Mindful Learning to Transform Youth Programs

Stacy Kelsey

Mindful Learning is a cognitive, social, and emotional approach that uses the power of relationships, the mind, and the brain to foster positive outcomes for children. This innovative, systematic framework addresses the development of the mind (how we think), our emotions (how we feel), and our behaviors (what we do) into actionable steps that transform youth and program outcomes. Learn how to assess, decode, and implement the skills necessary to improve the decision-making skills, emotional regulation abilities, and communication styles of children and the overall culture of your organization.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Understand the relational mind-brain-behavior connection of human learning.*
- *Understand the systematic structure of the 10 Elements of Mindful Learning and the influence of human learning and organizational growth.*
- *Learn how mindful learning engagements improve an organization's cultural environment, and the mind-body-behavioral interactions between youth and staff.*

Dr. Stacy Kelsey, PsyD is a psychologist, neuroscience coach, consultant, national trainer, and founder of Brainworks Pediatric Group. With over 25 years of experience working with children, families, educators, and professionals, she specializes in helping people understand how the brain, mind, emotions, relationships, and behaviors interact to support children's learning and program development. She is the creator of the Mindful Learning Model, a neurocognitive-developmental framework that combines relational learning, mindful engagement, emotional regulation, and relationship-building practices to improve learning and behavior outcomes. Her work emphasizes that relationships change the brain and that all people learn best when they feel safe, connected, understood, and emotionally supported. Through coaching, consulting, professional development, and training programs, Dr. Kelsey provides practical and innovative strategies that help families, schools, childcare centers, and organizations create calm, connected, and successful learning environments. Her programs are recognized for their engaging, experiential, and individualized approach to supporting both children and adults in reaching their full potential.



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9 NOVEMBER 14.00-15.30 | HAMPTON

Innovator: Launching a CYC Aligned Career Beyond the System

Deb Cockerton and Heather Sago

Child and Youth Care practitioners and relational professionals bring deep commitment, creativity, and an abundance of skills to their work. Yet many experience systemic constraints that limit innovation, professional autonomy, and the full utilization of their competencies, hindering their ability to provide relational care, opportunities for change, and developmental growth of both clients and self. In addition, pay/salaries are often at or below a living wage while inflexible hours can further make other personal responsibilities, such as providing for/raising a family, much more difficult.

This interactive workshop invites participants into a collaborative learning space to explore how their strengths, lived and living experiences, as well as creative capacities can extend beyond traditional service systems while also allowing for alternative sources of income.

Grounded in relational practice and social pedagogy, the session supports participants in identifying community needs, exploring ethical and sustainable approaches to innovation, and reimagining their professional income pathways.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Participate in reflective exercises, peer dialogue, and practice-based examples.*
- *Shape ideas for their own offerings; such as workshops, programming initiatives, digital/print resources, and consultancy work - that aligns with their values.*
- *Introduction of a supportive network for ongoing connection, collaboration, and systemic mental-health based advocacy efforts among like-minded practitioners.*

Deb Cockerton is a seasoned Child and Youth Care practitioner and entrepreneur who strives to meet the needs of the CYC community. She is the creator of the CYC Professional Development Tracker App, owner of CYC Assets – a webinar company, and Co-owner of Otonabee Family Counselling Centre and RelationalWise.

Heather Sago is a relational safety advocate, systems disrupter, certified Child and Youth Care practitioner, registered Social Worker, and educator with over three decades of experience. Through KINDitecture and co-founder of RelationalWise, she equips practitioners worldwide to lead systems change and create healing-centred relational practices that transform care.



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9 NOVEMBER 14.00-14.45 | COLLINS

The Intelligence of Experience in Relational Practice

Rochelle Sharpe Lohrasbe and L. Marie Damgaard

Relational practitioners and leaders work within increasingly complex emotional, interpersonal, and systemic environments. In these settings, behaviours and relational dynamics are often approached as problems to manage rather than meaningful responses shaped by lived conditions.

This presentation introduces Wayfinding and The Intelligence of Experience as an ecological-relational orientation that invites practitioners to understand experience through the lens of adaptation, context, and relational process. Drawing from relational practice, reflective traditions, trauma-informed perspectives, and ecological thinking, the presentation explores how presence, attention, relational climates, and reflective awareness influence what becomes possible within caring relationships and systems.

Participants will be invited to consider how ecological approaches to experience may support reflective leadership, practitioner sustainability, and more responsive relational cultures within complex care environments.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Explore ecological understandings of behaviour and relational dynamics within caring relationships and systems.*
- *Reflect on how presence, attention, and relational climates influence relational practice and leadership.*
- *Consider ways reflective and relational approaches may support responsiveness, sustainability, and connection within complex care environments.*

Dr. Rochelle Sharpe Lohrasbe is a therapist, educator, and writer exploring ecological and relational approaches to human experience, reflective practice, and therapeutic presence. Her work integrates relational practice, trauma-informed perspectives, phenomenology, and embodied awareness to support responsive, sustainable approaches within complex caring and therapeutic systems.

L. Marie Damgaard is an educator in Health Sciences and Psychology and an international lecturer in Sensorimotor Psychotherapy. She supports clients, practitioners, and students through teaching, counselling, and consultation grounded in relational, trauma-informed, and embodied approaches to mental health, addiction, intimacy, and therapeutic practice.



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9 NOVEMBER 14.45-15.30 | COLLINS

Holding Humanity Under Pressure

Danah A. Williams

Holding Humanity Under Pressure: Sustaining Relational Cultures in Challenging Systems: In youth-serving and caregiving systems, relational cultures can quietly erode under chronic stress, burnout, fear, and workforce instability. This presentation explores relational leadership not primarily as authority or management, but as emotional and cultural stewardship. Together, we will examine how relational values are preserved during challenging times through psychological safety, reflective practice, mentorship, repair, and intentional culture-building. Drawing from trauma-informed and relational frameworks across mental health, nonprofit, educational, and caregiving settings, participants will explore practical approaches to sustaining humane, connected, and resilient relational cultures while supporting both emerging and experienced leaders across generations.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Participants will explore how stress, burnout, fear, and organizational instability can impact relational cultures within child, youth, and caregiving systems.*
- *Participants will identify practical relational leadership approaches that help preserve psychological safety, reflective practice, mentorship, and emotional connection during challenging times.*
- *Participants will examine how relational leadership and intergenerational wisdom-sharing can strengthen resilience, sustain humane organizational cultures, and support emerging leaders across helping professions.*

Danah A. Williams, M.A., LMFT is a licensed psychotherapist whose work bridges psychology, leadership, and organizational systems. With over 25 years of experience in mental health and human services, she brings a trauma-informed and relational lens to leadership, mentorship, and culture-building within caregiving systems. Danah holds an M.A. in Clinical Psychology and a B.S. in Organizational Leadership, and is passionate about preserving relational wisdom, supporting emerging leaders, and exploring how emotionally intelligent systems sustain healthier outcomes for practitioners, children, youth, and families.



AMAL YOUTH AND FAMILY CENTRE

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9 NOVEMBER 15.45-16.30 | MAIN HALL

We Cannot Lead What We Will Not Live: Relational Practice as Relational Leadership

John Paul Fitzpatrick

This conference asks how we remain rooted in relational practice while rising into relational leadership. This paper argues that the two are not a developmental sequence but a single grammar: the relational principles that define good child and youth care — Garfat and Fulcher's characteristics, the Being–Interpreting–Doing of everyday encounter, mattering, and the conviction that the relationship is itself the intervention — should also govern how we lead teams, programmes and organisations.

Drawing on twenty-five years spanning detached youth work and residential-care education, national programme leadership, international alternative-care development with CELCIS, and executive coaching, the author traces what happens when leaders carry relational practice upward — and what is lost when they do not. The paper names a recognisable failure mode: organisations that mandate loving, relational care for young people while leading their own workforce through instrumental, audit-driven, anti-relational means. This gap, it argues, is a principal source of the moral injury and compassion fatigue now well documented in residential care.

Against this, it offers relational leadership as the "other 23 hours" of the workforce: supervision as containment rather than compliance, the leader's conscious use of self, and decisions that treat staff as resourceful rather than as risks to be managed. We cannot ask practitioners to heal through connection inside systems that are led without it.

The session closes with practical markers of relational leadership and an invitation to collective reflection.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Establish that relational practice and relational leadership are not separate disciplines, one for practitioners and one for managers, but a single relational instinct exercised at different scales: the presence and care we bring to a young person should be the same presence and care that shapes how we lead a team.*
- *Explore a tension familiar across the sector: staff are asked to offer warm, relational care to young people while being led themselves through targets, audits, and compliance. We will examine the costs of this mismatch and its role in the root causes of moral injury and burnout across the sector.*
- *Offer practical markers of relational leadership, supervision that holds rather than monitors, leaders alert to their own impact in the room, staff trusted as capable rather than managed as risk, so participants can hold these markers up against their own workplace and carry the conversation forward.*

Dr John Paul Fitzpatrick is Course Lead on the MSc Child and Youth Care Studies at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, in the School of Social Work and Social Policy. He has twenty years of practice in child and youth care and youth work settings, from detached youth work and residential care education through to national programme leadership. His career also spans international alternative-care development with CELCIS and SIRCC, board roles across the sector as well as providing executive leadership coaching. His doctoral research explored how coaching and mentoring relationships can shape the lives of care-experienced young people and developed the REIDS model of resilience and social capital.



PLENARY

10 NOVEMBER 10.00-11.00 | MAIN HALL

Relational Leadership: Cultivating Program Participants into Staff and into the Fabric of the Agency

Jody Rhodes

Neu-Life Community Development provides a variety of career development, out-of-school time, and prevention programs to support the development of youth and their families. Come learn about our innovative approach of putting our youth in control of programming, recruiting our teen participants to become the next generation of Neu-Life staff, and Neu-Vue, the state-of-the-art building which will provide safe, modern, and affordable housing for our youth workers and Neu-Life alumni.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Learn how to cultivate program participants into staff.*
- *Learn how to create youth-centered programming in your organization.*
- *Learn about an innovative housing model for youth workers and young adults aged 18-14 that combines housing and programmatic needs.*

Jody Rhodes is the executive director of Neu-Life Community Development, a nonprofit providing educational, recreational, and workforce development programming for Milwaukee's youth. Jody has more than 30 years of experience working with at-risk youth and families and has extensive experience with program development, best practices, fund development, and staff development. She serves as a leader among Wisconsin child and youth practitioners.

As Executive Director of Neu-Life, Jody oversees five after-school and summer program sites, serving approximately 3,000 unduplicated youth a year and managing a talented and dedicated staff. As the Executive Director, she is responsible for all program operations including supervision; program facilitation and development; evaluation; fund development and professional development.

Also, since 2016 Jody has served as the president of the National Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (NACYCP), a membership organization of child and youth care practitioners, service providers, and state and regional associations committed to improving the profession of child and youth care.

Jody holds a Bachelor of Science degree in secondary education and a Master's degree in administrative leadership in education, both from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She also has a certificate from the Harvard Business School's Strategic Perspectives in Nonprofit Management program.



10 NOVEMBER 11.30-13.00 | MAIN HALL

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Creating a Circle of Compassion: Supporting Students with Trauma Histories

Anne Martin and Michelle Watson

Students who have experienced trauma often struggle in school as they frequently present with complex behaviours due to their histories of adversity. An approach to intervention that focuses on behaviourist principles is ineffective for these children. Instead, it is critical for educators to understand the neurobiological impacts of trauma and implement strategies that assist students in developing regulation strategies and positive relationships with peers and adults. We have developed our Circle of Compassion, a framework that provides educators with a holistic approach to address the physiological, emotional, interpersonal and educational needs of traumatised children. Our workshop includes both theoretical underpinnings for educators to gain understanding of the “why” of trauma, as well as a multitude of practical strategies that can be implemented in classrooms and throughout the school environment. We will also discuss how administrators and mental health practitioners can support educators who are at the heart of this work.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Define trauma and acknowledge the profound impacts it has on the physical, emotional, relational and cognitive development of children.*
- *Share and explain the Circle of Compassion framework that integrates knowledge of neurobiology, co-regulation, relationship building, and educational interventions that educators can access in order to support students who have experienced trauma.*
- *Share ideas for creating community and positive, authentic relationships through restorative justice practices that repair ruptures in relationships while also ensuring accountability.*

Anne Martin is an Educational Consultant focusing on trauma-informed practices. She has been a Principal, Vice Principal, Teacher, and Behaviour Specialist with the Thames Valley District School Board. She obtained a Bachelor’s Degree from the University of North Carolina, Master’s Degree from George Washington University, and a Graduate Certificate in Applied Educational Neuroscience.

Michelle Watson is a school social worker with a passion for supporting youth and their families. Michelle earned an Honours BA in Child and Youth Care at Toronto Metropolitan University, Certificate in Play Therapy from Western University, and a Master’s Degree in Social Work from Laurier University.



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10 NOVEMBER 11.30-13.00 | BEAUMONT

Relational Leadership: Building a Relational Supervision and Mentorship Model

Michelle Briegel

Direct care systems are facing ongoing challenges with workforce retention, burnout, and leadership development. Emerging research highlights that relational conditions, not just organizational structures, are central to sustaining practitioners and cultivating future leaders.

This interactive workshop introduces the Relational Supervision and Leadership Mentorship Model, an evolving framework grounded in current research on practitioner retention and relational practice. Drawing on existing literature and current research, practitioner retention work, and applied supervisory and leadership experience, this session invites participants to explore how supervision can move beyond oversight toward relational leadership development.

This session reframes supervision as a relational leadership practice and positions mentorship as a key mechanism for intergenerational knowledge transfer and leadership cultivation. Participants will engage in experiential activities, reflective dialogue, and practical design work to begin building or refining relational supervision and mentorship practices within their own contexts.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Explore mentoring and developing emerging leaders through relational supervision and mentorship structures.*
- *Address relational leadership in challenging systems, including high turnover and burnout contexts.*
- *Support intergenerational knowledge transfer through intentional mentorship practices.*

Dr. Michelle Briegel is a child and youth care practitioner, university educator, and researcher specializing in relational practice, workforce retention, and practitioner sustainability. Michelle supports organizations to strengthen workforce retention through relational leadership and supervision. Her research examines turnover and retention among direct care practitioners, focusing on relational conditions that support longevity in the field, and she is actively developing a Relational Supervision and Leadership Mentorship Model to support practitioners, supervisors, and organizations in building sustainable relational cultures.

Harmony

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10 NOVEMBER 11.30-13.00 | HAMPTON

From the Mouth of Babes

Delia Noel

From the Mouth of Babes is a reflective essay that discusses what children and youth can teach professionals about effective child and youth care practice. Originally written during undergraduate studies and later published in the collection *Child and Youth Care Practice: Collected Wisdom for New Practitioners*, the essay argues that children's words, behaviors, and perspectives are valuable sources of insight for caregivers and practitioners. The central message is that successful child and youth care depends on genuinely listening to children rather than assuming adults always know what is best. The session encourages workers to view children as active participants in their own care rather than passive recipients of services. This interactive workshop reviews six (6) competencies of child and youth care identified by youth as characteristics of a favourable therapeutic alliance and practical ways to apply them in everyday interventions with youth. Child and Youth Care work is not about perfection but supporting teens in seeking excellence within themselves, for themselves.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Discover and embody intentionality in their practice.*
- *Develop a toolbox of techniques to engage youth in care.*
- *Understand the difference between impact and intent when intervening.*

Delia Noel, S.C.C, MA is a Special Care Counsellor by trade and a change management and organizational consultant by profession. With over 30 years working with families, adolescents and young adults, there is a lot of practical experience to draw from. Delia currently works for Youth Protection with the Inuit Population in Northern Quebec along the James Bay Coast and has a private practice offering relational coaching.



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10 NOVEMBER 11.30-12.15 | COLLINS

The Power of Relational Leadership in a Transactional World

Brian Hogan

Relational leadership as an organisation wide ethos, leading and supporting the residential care workforce with genuineness. Why do it? And how?

Across many different countries recruitment and retention of the residential care workforce is identified as a key factor in sustainable development of the provision of quality residential care for children and young people.

Many services report it as their key problem, their biggest risk factor in sustainability in their organisation. It can't all be new, younger staffs fault? What about where relational leadership is absent at all or even some organisational levels?

We will outline the organisational cost of not leading in a congruent, relational fashion, not supporting a workforce comprehensively, discuss with practical examples what this might look like and compare it to a situation where established principles of supervision, reflective practice, mentoring and team development are applied using real life practice examples.

We will also discuss CPD and how we should encourage staff to engage, and apply practical strategies for doing so.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Congruent Leadership.*
- *Relational Staff Support.*
- *Reflective Practice.*

Brian Hogan is Director of *Relationships at Work* and brings 36 years' experience in the public sector, including 20 years in senior leadership roles and five years as CEO. His expertise spans leadership, relational care, and team development. A passionate mentor of emerging leaders, Brian also contributes to boards and professional bodies that shape social care standards nationally.



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10 NOVEMBER 12.15-13.00 | COLLINS

Reflecting on the Roots of Our Practice

Breanna Bruns

This interactive workshop is focused on guided reflection where participants individually and collectively explore, reflect, and share their “why” or their “roots” of their professional practice and leadership. With a narrative-therapy based activity and meaningful questions, participants have the opportunity to creatively engage and contribute to collective curiosity, care and sustainability.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Recognize the value of compassionate curiosity when it comes to our roots and our “why” behind the work we do - what parts of our story sustain us and what may be getting in the way?*
- *Explore how authentic, supportive relationships and relational leadership can create opportunities for one’s discoveries of resilience, innate strength, and potential for healing and growth.*
- *Share the possibilities that exist in practice when we are (re)connected to self, to each other, and to the world around us.*

Breanna Bruns is a multi-faceted human being whose work is rooted in love, interconnectedness, and a deep belief in our collective capacity for expansion. She walks alongside folks with curiosity, compassion, and humour, cultivated by her lived experiences, professional practice, and commitment to community justice and care. Preceding an education in Child & Youth Care, Breanna’s understanding of the power of vulnerability, courage and systems of care is deeply personal. With a family of origin impacted by complex trauma and growing up within the child protection system, she holds a unique and nuanced perspective from the intersections of recipient, family and community member, and now service provider.



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10 NOVEMBER 14.00-15.30 | MAIN HALL

Connection, Reflection and Inspiration: Strategic Leadership in Child and Youth Care

Harrison Dax Nash

This presentation explores strategic leadership in child and youth care through themes of connection, reflection, and inspiration. It emphasises that effective leadership begins with self-awareness, encouraging practitioners to consider how they are perceived by the children they support.

The session highlights the importance of humility, reflection and the ability to apologise as key leadership qualities. Listening, being present and actively supporting staff through practical check-ins are identified as essential practices. We will look at creative ways of achieving and normalising this. The presentation underscores the need for psychologically safe teams.

Being able to form strong, trusting relationships with those we work with are central, as secure bonds with adults reduce risk and promote positive outcomes. Grounded in trauma-informed principles, the presentation promotes low-arousal approaches and advocates for strengths-based practice. The importance of persistence, connection and optimism is highlighted – leading with empathy and authenticity and never giving up on our children.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Develop self-aware leadership practice: Participants will be able to reflect on their own values, behaviours, and leadership style, understanding how they are perceived by children and staff and how this impacts relationships and outcomes.*
- *Apply relational and reflective leadership skills: Participants will be able to demonstrate key leadership behaviours, including active listening, reflection, humility and the ability to repair relationships, while fostering psychologically safe and supportive team environments.*
- *Implement trauma-informed, strengths-based approaches: Participants will be able to guide staff in low-arousal strategies with children and build strong, trusting relationships that promote resilience, connection and positive outcomes for children and young people.*

Harrison Dax Nash is founder of the Maranatha Care Children UK charity. He was Programme Manager and Social Work Supervisor for 13 years with Maranatha-Siyakatala Child & Youth Care Centre in Gqeberha, South Africa. Maranatha Care Children was formed in 2009 and aims to help South African children by offering development in education and life skills, providing suitable home environments and safeguarding the future of those in residential care.

In the UK, he is Honorary Lecturer at the University of Plymouth, Registered Children's Home Manager at Plymouth City Council and both a British Empire Medal (BEM) and British Citizen Award (BCA) recipient.



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10 NOVEMBER 14.00-15.30 | BEAUMONT

Relational Leadership in Action: Building Impactful Global Leadership in Child and Youth Care

Kari Sisson and Kiaras Gharabaghi

Simply adding the term 'relational' in front of a noun risks trivializing the deep and diverse meanings of relational practice. What, for example, do we mean by the phrase 'relational leadership'? Does this term merely denote a philosophy or is it also a practical approach to strengthening the people, partnerships, and systems that support children and young people in care? While we are frequently willing and able to identify key stakeholders and opportunities for connection in our own areas of professional impact, how can we zoom out to understand the core principles that sustain relational practice across diverse cultural, organizational, policy, and systemic contexts that are often at odds with one another? Where are the opportunities and challenges of investing in effective global child and youth care leadership that is responsive, inclusive, and grounded in the well-being of children, young people, families, and communities? Ultimately, we aim to articulate a 'relational leadership' practice that creates congruence across interpersonal practices in child and youth care and the navigations and collaborations across sectors, systems, structures, and policy frameworks that are necessary to ensure CYC leadership in a global context is both meaningful and impactful for children, youth, their families and their communities.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- **Define and critically examine the concept of relational leadership within child and youth care, distinguishing it from relational philosophy alone by exploring its practical application across interpersonal, organizational, and systemic contexts.**
- **Analyze the opportunities and challenges of relational leadership in a global context, identifying strategies for fostering collaborative, culturally responsive, and inclusive leadership across diverse sectors, organizations, and policy environments.**
- **Apply the principles of relational leadership to strengthen practice and systems, developing approaches that promote congruence between everyday relational interactions and the broader partnerships, structures, and leadership processes that enhance outcomes for children, young people, families, and communities.**

Kari Sisson is Executive Director of the Association of Children's Residential & Community Services (ACRC), an international organization dedicated to advancing quality residential and community-based services for children, youth, and families. She is a recognized leader in systems transformation, relationship-centered practice, and collaborative leadership, with a strong commitment to amplifying youth and family voice. Kari has led strategic initiatives that strengthen partnerships across policy, practice, and research, including the integration of the Building Bridges Initiative into ACRC.

Dr. Kiaras Gharabaghi worked in youth-serving settings for 25 years before joining the School of Child and Youth Care at Toronto Metropolitan University. Since then, he has led system and contributed to change processes across Canada, the US, Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia. He has published over 300 books, articles and creative writings on child and youth care practice, system change, social innovation, and research methods. Most recently, he served as Dean of the Faculty of Community Services, where he was responsible for other fields of care practices, including social work, nutrition, nursing, midwifery, dietetics, and public health.

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10 NOVEMBER 14.00-15.30 | HAMPTON

Anchoring the Nervous System: Drawing on Visualisation, Art and Somatic Exercises to Counteract Stress and Adversity

Marian Connell

This workshop will focus on anchoring the nervous system drawing on visualisation, art and Somatic Exercises to counteract stress and adversity in our daily lives as Social Care Workers. As Social Care Workers we are expected to be able to self-regulate and calm our nervous system. Social Care workers are also expected to co-regulate others. In this workshop I offer creative techniques through breathing, anchoring, visualisation, art and group discussion to soothe the nervous system and give new strategies to help build resilience. These strategies are adaptable and can be used with the young people we serve.

Participants will engage in a somatic and expressive arts activity to gain strategies to calm their nervous system. The activity will commence with a short embodiment exercise whereby participants can connect to different autonomic states drawing on the works of Deb Dana (2023) Bringing awareness to our embodied experience is crucial to understanding how we are feeling and responding in the moment. I will touch on frameworks for working safely with adversity and facilitating post traumatic growth through creativity and somatic expression. The participants will engage in a body scan followed by guided imagery exercise. Participants will be invited to draw out their image and time will be allocated after for participants to discuss important takeaways from these exercises. Participants will reflect on their body sensations before and after this exercise and become attuned to their states of being gaining greater awareness of their state of regulation and dysregulation. These exercises empower participants to gain a deeper insight into their bodily reactions and make positive changes in their daily lives which may help build their capacity to care for themselves and the young people they serve. (Costello, Short, 2022).

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *To recognise stress within the body and bring awareness to our embodied experience.*
- *To give participants tools/strategies that they can use to manage stress experienced within their professional and personal lives.*
- *Integrating somatic techniques to daily practices of self-care.*

Marian Connell is a Lecturer in Applied Social Care in Technological University Dublin, Tallaght Campus. Prior to becoming a lecturer, she worked in a variety of residential care settings, in family support as a social care worker and in management. She has twenty years' experience as a child psychotherapist and thirty years' postgraduate training as a social care worker. Marian has a degree in Social Care, postgraduate diplomas in Child Art Psychotherapy and Practice Based Play Therapy, and an MSc in Child Art Psychotherapy. Marian's research interests include trauma informed practice and the use of creative arts and somatic psychotherapy to help social care students, social care workers, social workers, counsellors and psychotherapists express their embodied self.

Marian lectures at post graduate level facilitating CPD's course on a Diploma in Trauma Informed Psychotherapy and Specialist Diploma in Non-Directive Play Therapy for Counsellors and Psychotherapists.



10 NOVEMBER 14.00-14.45 | COLLINS

Sustaining Relational Practice in Statutory Child Protection Systems: A Senior Practitioner Perspective

Chukwuemeka Emmanuel Ordu

Relational practice is foundational to effective work with children, young people, and families, yet within statutory child protection systems it is often challenged by procedural, risk-driven, and time-pressured environments. This presentation offers a practice-based reflection from a Senior Practitioner perspective in out-of-home care (OOHC), exploring how relational approaches can be sustained under these conditions.

Drawing on experience in a regional Australian context, the session highlights how workforce pressures, service limitations, and system demands influence everyday practice. It also incorporates culturally informed reflections on how practitioner identity and lived experience shape relational engagement.

The presentation outlines a relational leadership approach that operates without formal authority, using supervision, consultation, and modelling to influence practice culture. Practical strategies will be shared to support reflective supervision, proactive engagement, and maintaining connection-focused practice, offering transferable insights for professionals working in complex service systems.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Understand the tensions between relational practice and statutory system demands, and how these pressures can lead to drift toward task-focused, compliance-driven work.*
- *Identify practical strategies to sustain relational practice in complex environments, including reflective supervision, structured consultation, and intentional practice modelling.*
- *Recognise the role of relational leadership beyond formal authority, and how Senior Practitioners can influence culture, support practitioners, and maintain relational integrity within teams and systems.*

Chukwuemeka Emmanuel Ordu - I am a Senior Practitioner in out-of-home care (OOHC) with CatholicCare Hunter-Manning in NSW, Australia. My work focuses on strengthening relational practice within statutory child protection systems through reflective supervision, workforce development, and practice leadership. I have experience across permanency support, residential care, and complex case review, and I'm particularly interested in how practitioners sustain meaningful, relationship-based work in high-pressure environments. Bringing both a regional practice context and a culturally informed perspective, I am passionate about supporting practitioners and teams to maintain connection, integrity, and care in their everyday work with children and families.



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10 NOVEMBER 14.45-15.30 | COLLINS

Burning Out, Burning Bridges, and the Art of Bouncing Back: The Life Cycles of a Child and Youth Care Worker

Blair Semerak

Burnout, bureaucracy, and bad coffee, Blair shares his journey from overnight staff to writing, developing, and implementing new programs for trauma-informed homes for Indigenous girls during COVID-19, blending humour, storytelling, and lived experience. Through candid anecdotes about leadership, system politics, unionizing a for-profit organization, and supporting marginalized youth—including sexually exploited, gang-entrenched, and Two-Spirit youth—participants gain insight into the underbelly, complexities, and lived realities of child and youth care work and relational leadership.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- Insight into the full life cycle of a child and youth care worker from frontline staff to leadership, including program development, staffing, and navigating system politics, burnout, and organizational challenges such as unionizing.
- Understanding the complexities of working with marginalized and high-risk youth populations, including sexually exploited, gang-entrenched, and Two-Spirit youth, as well as the relational and cultural nuances of supporting Indigenous girls in trauma-informed care.
- Reflection on leadership, relational practice, and allyship — including the experience of being welcomed into Indigenous culture, learning about allyship, and navigating new cultural contexts, highlighting what burnout, resilience, and relational leadership truly look like in practice.

Blair Semerak began his career at the age of 18 in human services at the Manitoba Developmental Center as a psychiatric nursing assistant while studying psychiatric nursing. A program developer and relational leadership advocate based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, he progressed from frontline staff to writing, developing, and implementing programs for four trauma-informed homes for Indigenous girls aged 8–18 during the COVID-19 pandemic, managing teams of up to 95 staff. Blair blends humour, lived experience, and storytelling to illuminate burnout, leadership challenges, and systemic complexities—including unionizing a for-profit organization and supporting youth facing exploitation, gang entrenchment, and identity development. He now is developing children's books and expanding this session into a full book and continues to reside in Winnipeg Manitoba Canada.



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10 NOVEMBER 15.45-16.30 | MAIN HALL

Relational Leadership in Action: Mentoring Emerging Leaders

Wendy Gee

Developing the next generation of leaders in Child and Youth Care requires more than traditional supervision. Emerging practitioners often enter the field with strong values but limited support navigating complex systems, secondary trauma, and ethical decision-making. Without intentional mentorship, many struggle to sustain relational practice in demanding environments.

This workshop explores how relational leadership can guide the mentorship of emerging leaders. Drawing on practice in residential programs supporting youth impacted by exploitation and trauma, the session highlights how relational supervision, reflective practice, and values-based mentorship strengthen practitioner resilience while maintaining relational integrity with young people.

Participants will explore practical strategies for cultivating leadership capacity through mentorship, including modelling ethical practice, fostering reflective supervision, and supporting intergenerational knowledge transfer. Through discussion and case examples, participants will leave with tools to develop emerging leaders across residential, community, and school-based settings.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Examine how relational leadership principles can be applied to mentor and develop emerging leaders in Child and Youth Care practice.*
- *Identify practical mentorship strategies that support reflective supervision, ethical decision-making, and practitioner resilience in complex youth-serving environments.*
- *Explore approaches to intergenerational knowledge transfer, including how experienced practitioners and lived experience educators can collaborate to strengthen leadership pathways within organizations.*

Wendy Gee is the Executive Director of A New Day Youth and Adult Services in Ottawa, Canada. With over 30 years' experience in the social service sector, she works with youth impacted by exploitation and trauma. Wendy is a lived experience educator who provides training on relational practice, trauma-informed care, and leadership in Child and Youth Care.



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PLENARY

11 NOVEMBER 10.00-11.00 | MAIN HALL

Philosophy, Law and Deep Care for Community: The Relational Leader

Kiaras Gharabaghi

This presentation is based on an ongoing process of systematic reflection on leadership in child and youth serving systems, from residential care settings to agency management. It draws on transdisciplinary approaches to identify not only the characteristics of such leadership, but how these are operationalized across contexts. In that process, the concept of deep care is articulated to denote a leadership approach that merges an understanding of philosophy and law (and regulations and budgets) with a relational positioning toward communities, including communities of children, of parents and kin, as well as of caregivers. As such, the relational leader steps beyond rigid principles of any one discipline in the child and youth services systems and offers instead a care system from which knowledge, skills, and relational practices emerge as anchors for quality care practices that are accessible to children and adults alike.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Leadership is not contained within a discipline or singular professional practice.*
- *Leadership is not an individual trait but an orientation and understanding of community.*
- *Relational leadership is accessible to anyone committed to 'deep care'.*

Dr. Kiaras Gharabaghi worked in youth-serving settings for 25 years before joining the School of Child and Youth Care at Toronto Metropolitan University. Since then, he has led system and contributed to change processes across Canada, the US, Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia. He has published over 300 books, articles and creative writings on child and youth care practice, system change, social innovation, and research methods. Most recently, he served as Dean of the Faculty of Community Services, where he was responsible for other fields of care practices, including social work, nutrition, nursing, midwifery, dietetics, and public health.

Harmony

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11 NOVEMBER 11.30-13.00 | MAIN HALL

Accompaniment: The Heart of Relational Leadership

Howard Bath

In this workshop, Howard will trace the emergence of relational approaches to out of home care work and how these differ from other common frameworks. Drawing on the words of young people in care and findings from relational neuroscience, he will highlight on an often-overlooked aspect of relational care, the role of 'accompaniment' in meeting the needs of young people. Building on feedback from practitioners in the workshop, as well as his own experiences, he will then consider the vital role of accompaniment in leadership, particularly in the out-of-home care context.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *To gain a sense of the extensive research findings relating to trauma, healing and relationships.*
- *To understand the meaning of 'accompaniment' and how it both overlaps with and differs from similar constructs such as friendship and mentoring.*
- *To understand the powerful role of 'accompaniment' in supervision and leadership).*

Dr Howard Bath worked as a child and youth care worker and residential coordinator in Australia before training in clinical psychology and then completing a PhD in Social Welfare at the University of Washington. He subsequently worked as a clinician, agency director and then Children's Commissioner for Australia's Northern Territory. Howard has authored many journal articles and book chapters and is the lead author (with Dr John Seita) of the book *The Three Pillars of Transforming Care: Trauma and resilience in the 'other 23 hours*. He currently provides a range of consultancy, research and training services.



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11 NOVEMBER 11.30-12.15 | BEAUMONT

Designing Relational Support Systems: Co-Creating a Framework for Workforce Sustainability

Audrey Moore

This interactive workshop invites participants to collaboratively explore what meaningful support looks like for those working in social care and related professions. Drawing on practice experience, supervision models, and relational leadership principles, the session will begin to co-create a conceptual “matrix of support”, a practical framework designed to help organisations identify and respond to the real needs of their workforce.

Participants will reflect on the challenges faced in their own contexts (e.g. burnout, complexity, organisational pressure) and map these against relational, reflective, and structural supports. Through guided discussion and small group work, the workshop will generate ideas that will inform the development of a PhD research project focused on designing adaptable, relationally grounded support systems.

This session offers both a space for shared learning and an opportunity to shape future research in relational leadership practice.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Participants will critically reflect on the relationship between workforce challenges and the availability (or absence) of relational supports in their practice contexts.*
- *Participants will contribute to the co-creation of a draft “matrix of support” linking staff needs with practical, relationally grounded interventions.*
- *Participants will gain insight into how relational leadership can be operationalised through structured supports that sustain staff wellbeing, learning, and practice quality.*

Audrey Moore is a CORU-registered Social Care Worker, lecturer, and consultant with over 20 years' experience across social care, education, and leadership. She specialises in trauma-informed practice, relational supervision, and workforce development, supporting organisations to build reflective, sustainable cultures. Audrey has worked extensively with individuals with intellectual disabilities and with staff teams navigating complex systems. She is the founder of Trust Consultancy and is currently developing research interests focused on relational leadership and supervision. Audrey is passionate about creating spaces where practitioners can think, feel, and grow in their work.



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11 NOVEMBER 12.15-13.00 | BEAUMONT

Sustainable Approaches in Family Strengthening: HiH Parenting Pilot Program

Eva Ihasz and Timea Teterják

In a world that often lacks encouragement, recognition, and support-especially in child-rearing-parents and caregivers most need the experience of having a village around them to parent well and to provide children with nurturing environments.

The Hand in Hand Parenting Program (HiH), rooted in California, offers courses, workshops, and support to parents, caregivers, and professionals across borders through its network of instructors worldwide.

HiH Parenting Program is a trauma-responsive caregiving approach grounded in evidence-based practice. It uses five simple tools to foster the healing of relational disturbances within families, communities and to strengthen the parent/caregiver-child bond.

As part of a pilot program, the Hungarian Association of HiH reached out to Hungarian minority families living in Serbia offering 6 weeks HiH foundation courses and workshops. We present several examples of parents lived experiences and what the use of HiH tools has meant within their parenting.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *How emotion-based intervention tools can support secure attachment.*
- *How reflective functioning may emerge in the lived experiences of parents and caregivers using HiH listening-based tools (Listening Partnership, Special Time, Staylistening, Setting Limits, and Playlistening).*
- *To explore examples of how HiH Parenting tools can be implemented in professional care environments.*

Eva Ihasz is a certified Hand in Hand Parenting Instructor, social worker, and psychologist. She has worked in addiction rehabilitation, UK residential child care, and foster care leadership at SOS Children's Villages Hungary. She trains in Trauma-Informed Care and WHO EASE program and enjoys supporting local communities.

Timea Teterják is a Hand in Hand Parenting instructor dedicated to helping parents build stronger, more connected relationships with their children. She facilitates workshops and parent groups that provide practical tools, emotional support, and a safe space for reflection and growth. Her work focuses on empowering parents to better understand their children's emotions and behaviors while strengthening trust, connection, and mutual respect within the family. She believes that when parents feel supported and confident, they can create secure, nurturing relationships that help children thrive. Her passion is guiding families toward deeper connection, greater resilience, and more joyful everyday interactions.



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11 NOVEMBER 11.30-12.15 | HAMPTON

Healing Environments: Implementing Trauma-Informed Care in Residential Care

Natasha Mahony and Simon Hogan

This workshop will outline the roll-out of a trauma-informed care (TIC) training programme in a residential care setting and discussing the importance of commitment to TIC in a non-enhanced service. It will then invite reflections and discussion on the importance and challenges of using TIC in a residential care setting.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Importance of using TIC in a non-enhanced service.*
- *Overcoming challenges or resistance to TIC in residential care.*
- *Outline how non-enhanced services can still utilise clinicians to provide the best possible care to their young persons.*

Dr. Natasha Mahony is a clinical and forensic psychologist. She has worked at Harmony Care since 2025 and has experience in community, correctional, and disability services. She is passionate about trauma-informed care, preventative care, and de-stigmatising access to mental health care.

Simon Hogan is an experienced social care worker who now holds the position of Chief Operations Officer at Harmony Care. He is passionate driving meaningful change, fostering a culture of compassion, excellence, and resilience in care.



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Harmony

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11 NOVEMBER 12.15-13.00 | HAMPTON

Resilience and Empathy: A Social Care Story

David Power

After spending nearly 38 years in social care what is the learning of a social care worker where relationships was key to the journey. A journey taken together understanding ups and downs in a unknowing world. The opportunity to make things better and hope the dreams and hopes of others.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Bringing self to the work.*
- *Attunement.*
- *Being committed to the young people.*

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 11.30-12.15 | COLLINS

The Odyssey Saoirse Programme: From Environment to Experience – Embedding Relational Practice Through Sensory and Experiential Interventions in Residential Care

Lorcan Gleeson and Ashleigh Best

The needs of children living in residential care homes are often described as complex. There is increasing recognition that relational practice must extend beyond theoretical frameworks and become embedded within the environments, experiences, and relationships that shape everyday care. The Saoirse Programme, developed within an Integrated Care Services (ICS) model, represents a whole-system approach to operationalising relational care through sensory-informed environments and outdoor experiential group interventions. Saoirse combines ecotherapy, adventure therapy, sensory environments, breathwork, aligned with Positive Behaviour Support and psychological services. The approach emphasises creating therapeutic environments and shared experiences, making activities and relationship based outdoor environments accessible for young people who may not benefit from traditional, talk-based methods or who simply prefer outdoor interventions.

A key component of the programme is the delivery of group-based experiential interventions, including therapeutic trekking and outdoor challenges. These interventions provide structured opportunities for shared experience, co-regulation, and graded challenge, supporting the development of resilience, identity, and relational trust. Within these environments, relationships are formed and tested in real time, allowing young people to experience themselves as capable, connected, and valued.

A central theme of this programme is the role of relational leadership in sustaining the model. While Saoirse provides relational leadership, design, and guidance, residential teams and young people are supported to maintain and embed practices within daily care to support sustained change.

Drawing on implementation experience, challenges, and emerging outcomes, this presentation offers a transferable model for organisations seeking to embed relational practice across residential systems while amplifying the voice of lived experience.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *How sensory environments and experiential interventions function as therapeutic tools within TIC.*
- *Explore the model integrating ecotherapy, adventure-based work, and sensory-informed practice*
- *The role of group-based interventions in promoting co-regulation, resilience, and relational development*
- *Recognise the value of lived experience and participation in shaping meaningful service delivery*
- *Understand how relational leadership and clear governance support sustainable, system-wide practice.*
- *Identify practical strategies to embed therapeutic environments and experiential interventions into residential care.*

Lorcan Gleeson is Saoirse Programme Lead, Integrated Care Services

Dr. Ashleigh Best is Head of Integrated Care Services, Odyssey Social Care

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11 NOVEMBER 12.15-13.00 | COLLINS

Risk and Resiliency Factors Amongst Social Work Educators

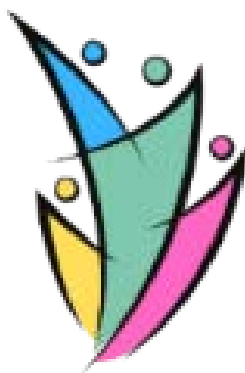
Varoshini Nadesan

This session presents the results of a quantitative study conducted at five South African universities. The study examined the wellness profiles of 27 social work educators using an online survey that consisted of demographic questions, the General Well-being Schedule (GWBS), the Multi-Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), the Adult Resilience Scale (ARM-R), and the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21). The analysis consisted of a descriptive and group comparison analysis of respondents' scale scores across the different scales. This study concluded that age, experience and social support were determining factors in coping with academic challenges and promoting flourishing. The complex demands of academic work, including publication, teaching, and institutional tasks, prevent educators from flourishing in their roles, leading to overall staff dissatisfaction and poor morale. The study offers recommendations for measures that higher education institutions can implement to support social work educators.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *The complexity of academia can adversely affect the way academics flourish or fail to flourish in the workplace.*
- *Is there a difference between how new and seasoned academics cope with roles?*
- *Do the risk factors outweigh resiliency factors in the workplace or vice versa?*

Varoshini Nadesan is an Associate Professor in the department of Social Work at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. Her fields of research include Social Work Education (Supervision and Employability of graduates), Child and Youth Care Work as well as Alcohol and Substance Dependency.



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11 NOVEMBER 14.00-15.30 | MAIN HALL

The Nervous System of a Relational Culture

Danah A. Williams

Relational cultures can become regulated, dysregulated, resilient, or overwhelmed under chronic stress and instability. This workshop explores schools, caregiving organizations, youth-serving programs, and helping systems through a trauma-informed and relational lens, examining how emotional contagion, burnout transmission, co-regulation, psychological safety, and relational repair shape the “nervous system” of a culture. Participants will engage in reflective exercises, relational mapping, leadership reflection prompts, and case-based discussion to better understand how stress and emotional states move through teams and systems. Together, we will explore practical relational tools that help sustain connected, psychologically safe, and emotionally responsive cultures that support healthier outcomes for practitioners, children, youth, families, and communities.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Participants will explore how emotional contagion, chronic stress, burnout, and co-regulation influence the functioning and relational safety of caregiving and youth-serving systems.*
- *Participants will identify trauma-informed relational practices that support psychological safety, relational repair, emotional responsiveness, and resilience within teams and organizational cultures.*
- *Participants will apply practical tools such as relational mapping, reflective leadership prompts, and co-regulation strategies to strengthen connected and sustainable relational cultures across helping professions.*

Danah A. Williams, M.A., LMFT is a licensed psychotherapist and interdisciplinary relational practitioner whose work bridges psychology, trauma-informed systems, organizational culture, and leadership. With over 25 years of experience in mental health and human services, she explores how emotional regulation, relational safety, and co-regulation shape the wellbeing of caregiving systems and the people within them. Danah holds an M.A. in Clinical Psychology and a B.S. in Organizational Leadership and is passionate about sustaining psychologically safe relational cultures that support practitioners, children, youth, families, and communities.



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11 NOVEMBER 14.00-15.30 | BEAUMONT

Care Reform: An Opportunity to Strengthen Relational Child and Youth Care

Coenraad de Beer

Across the world, care reform is reshaping how societies respond to children and young people who cannot live with their families. These processes are often influenced by policy, advocacy and systems actors. While their contribution is essential, care reform can lose touch with the everyday realities of care when the voices of children, young people, caregivers and child and youth care workers are not sufficiently heard.

This 45-minute session argues that relational child and youth care must become a stronger part of care reform thinking and practice. Care reform is not only about policies, structures, funding models or placement options. It is also about whether children experience safety, belonging, continuity and healing through the relationships in their daily lives.

Drawing on experiences from different countries, the session will highlight why the relational CYC community needs to be more actively involved in care reform processes. It will invite participants to consider how caregivers and CYC workers can contribute their practical knowledge, strengthen their collective voice, and influence the systems in which they work.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- **Care reform needs stronger relational insight:** Participants will recognise that care reform is often shaped without sufficient input from those closest to children's everyday care experiences, and consider why caregivers and child and youth care workers need greater voice, recognition and influence in reform processes.
- **Recognise relationships as central to care reform:** Participants will understand that care reform is not only about policies, structures or placement options, but also about protecting and strengthening the everyday relationships that support children's safety, belonging, healing and development.
- **Relational child and youth care practice gives care reform meaning:** Participants will understand how connection, continuity, participation and relational stability can strengthen quality care across a range of alternative care settings.

Coenraad de Beer joined SOS Children's Villages in 2002, supporting family strengthening and alternative care programmes in rural South Africa in response to the impact of HIV and AIDS on children and families. In 2010, he joined SOS Children's Villages International in Innsbruck, Austria, where he contributed to global initiatives on child safeguarding, youth employability, peer violence prevention, and relational child and youth care competency frameworks and training programmes. In 2022, he became Head of Child and Youth Care Practitioner Support. Since 2026, he has served as Research, Development and Innovation Advisor for SOS Children's Villages International.



11 NOVEMBER 14.00-14.45 | HAMPTON

Wayfinding in Relational Practice

Rochelle Sharpe Lohrasbe and L. Marie Damgaard

Relational practice often unfolds within rapidly changing emotional, interpersonal, and systemic environments. In the midst of complexity, urgency, and competing demands, practitioners and leaders can lose connection with the reflective presence that supports responsive relational care.

This interactive workshop introduces Wayfinding as an ecological-relational approach to navigating complex relational environments. Through reflective exercises, relational inquiry, and experiential practices, participants will explore how attention, presence, relational climates, and embodied awareness influence connection, responsiveness, and decision-making within caring relationships and systems.

Grounded in relational and trauma-informed practice, the workshop invites participants to explore practical and reflective approaches for sustaining relational presence, practitioner wellbeing, and responsive care within the realities of everyday practice.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Explore relational and ecological approaches to navigating complexity within caring relationships and systems.*
- *Reflect on how attention, presence, and relational climates influence responsiveness and connection in practice.*
- *Practice reflective and experiential approaches that support relational presence, responsiveness, and sustainability within everyday care practice.*

Dr. Rochelle Sharpe Lohrasbe is a therapist, educator, and writer exploring ecological and relational approaches to human experience, reflective practice, and therapeutic presence. Her work integrates relational practice, trauma-informed perspectives, phenomenology, and embodied awareness to support responsive, sustainable approaches within complex caring and therapeutic systems.

L. Marie Damgaard is an educator in Health Sciences and Psychology and an international lecturer in Sensorimotor Psychotherapy. She supports clients, practitioners, and students through teaching, counselling, and consultation grounded in relational, trauma-informed, and embodied approaches to mental health, addiction, intimacy, and therapeutic practice.



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11 NOVEMBER 14.45-15.30 | HAMPTON

Bridging Worlds: Practicing Psychology within a Social Pedagogical Framework

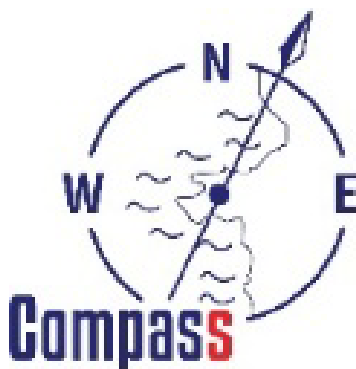
Niall Loftus and Kieran Hackett

This workshop explores the lived experience of practicing as a psychologist within Compass Child and Family Services in Clare, Ireland, a residential service grounded in social pedagogy. Drawing on clinical oversight of children in care, the session examines how psychological frameworks integrate with a relational, life-space model of care. It will highlight the opportunities and tensions that arise when traditional clinical roles meet a social pedagogical ethos, where shared living, relationships, and everyday experiences are central to development and healing. Through case reflections and practice examples, the workshop will consider how formulation, risk management, and therapeutic thinking can be adapted to fit this context while maintaining clinical integrity. Participants will gain insight into collaborative working with care teams, supporting reflective practice, and holding a psychologically informed lens within a non-clinical environment.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Psychology and social pedagogy can be meaningfully integrated, with clinical thinking adapting to a relational, life-space model rather than sitting outside it.*
- *The psychologist's role shifts from direct intervention to influence—through formulation, reflective practice, and supporting care staff in day-to-day interactions with children.*
- *Working in this model involves navigating tensions (e.g., risk, boundaries, clinical vs relational priorities) while maintaining a clear, psychologically informed perspective that enhances care rather than overrides it.*

Dr. Niall Loftus is a Chartered Senior Psychologist with extensive experience across child services, in the UK and Ireland both in the public and private sector. Niall currently works with Compass Child and Family Services in Clare, Ireland, providing psychological assessment, intervention, supervision, and training within a social pedagogical residential model. His work focuses on supporting children's psychological development through collaborative, evidence-based, multidisciplinary care.



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11 NOVEMBER 14.00-14.45 | COLLINS

Exploring a New Domain: Relational Practice and Technology

Monica Pauls

The use of digital technologies in Child and Youth Care (CYC) is transforming how practitioners connect with young people, yet it also raises complex questions—especially when working with those who are most vulnerable. Research suggests that technology can enhance youth work, but uncertainty remains about whether a therapeutic relationship can truly exist through technology.

This interactive workshop shares findings from a recent study exploring digital youth work in Alberta, Canada, highlighting the scope and character of this emerging area of practice. Participants will be introduced to a map of formal and informal digital CYC initiatives across the province and hear insights from practitioners about how they understand and apply digital tools in their work. Together, we'll reflect on the opportunities and risks of digital engagement, discuss how these findings connect to participants' own contexts, and consider what the future of digital practice in CYC might look like.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

By the end of the workshop, participants will:

- *have a greater understanding of the scope and characteristics of digital Child and Youth Care (CYC) practice in Alberta, including examples of formal and informal initiatives;*
- *reflect on how relational practice can be expressed through digital environments, including opportunities, risks and ethical considerations;*
- *apply insights from research and practice to inform their own use of digital tools in CYC contexts.*

Dr. Monica Pauls is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Child Studies and Social Work at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta. She teaches in the Child and Youth Care Program of the Bachelor of Child Studies, predominantly in the areas of program design and evaluation, research methods, social policy, and child and youth care practice. Prior to her position at MRU, Monica worked for several years with at-risk youth in schools, community programs and residential facilities. Monica completed her PhD in Sociology at the University of Calgary. Her research interests include digital technology and social media use among youth.



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11 NOVEMBER 14.45-15.30 | COLLINS

Where are all the Youth Voices?

Emmie Henderson Dekort

This interactive workshop explores how youth-serving professionals can meaningfully integrate youth voice into programs, policies, and everyday practice in alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), particularly Article 12, which affirms the right of young people to express their views and have those views taken seriously. While many organizations value youth engagement, young people are often consulted only after decisions have already been made. This session invites participants to reflect on where youth voices currently exist within their work and where gaps remain. Through guided discussion, small-group activities, and practical examples, participants will explore strategies for moving beyond token participation toward authentic partnership with young people. The workshop will highlight approaches such as youth advisory groups, co-design of programs, and youth-led evaluation. Participants will leave with practical tools and actionable ideas to strengthen youth participation and ensure that youth perspectives meaningfully shape the services and programs intended to support them.

Key Messages and Learning Outcomes

- *Understand youth participation as a right: Participants will explore how meaningful youth engagement is supported by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly Article 12, and why youth voice is essential to ethical and effective youth work.*
- *Recognize gaps in current practice: Participants will reflect on their own programs and organizations to identify where youth voice is present, where it is missing, and where participation may be limited to consultation rather than partnership. This should also help elevate practice.*
- *Apply practical strategies to elevate youth voice: Participants will learn practical tools and approaches (such as youth advisory groups, co-design processes, and youth-led evaluation) to meaningfully integrate youth perspectives into decision-making and program development.*

Dr. Emmie Henderson Dekort is an Assistant Professor and advocate dedicated to advancing rights-based approaches to youth work. Her work focuses on meaningful youth participation, youth voice, and strengthening practices that align with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Dr. Henderson Dekort brings experience working with young people and youth-serving organizations to develop programs and policies that move beyond consultation toward authentic youth partnership. Her research and practice explore how youth voices can be integrated into decision-making, program design, and evaluation to create more inclusive and responsive services. She is particularly interested in empowering young people as leaders within their communities and ensuring that youth perspectives shape the systems that affect their lives. Through her work, Dr. Henderson Dekort supports organizations and practitioners in building practical strategies that elevate youth voice and strengthen rights-based youth work.



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Relational Leadership in Motion: A World Café

International Panel

This interactive World Café invites participants into a dynamic, relational dialogue about the future of Child and Youth Care. Grounded in principles of relational leadership, this session creates space for collective sense-making around key tensions and opportunities shaping the field today. Through rotating small-group conversations, participants will explore topics such as post-secondary education, hope in practice, experiential versus cognitive learning, responses to youth mental health and substance use, and emerging directions for CYC. Rather than seeking definitive answers, this session centers shared wisdom, critical reflection, and connection across roles and contexts. Participants will leave with deeper insight into current challenges, renewed clarity about relational leadership in action, and practical ideas to strengthen practice, supervision, and systems moving forward.

- **Deepen understanding of relational leadership in practice.** Participants will explore how relational leadership is enacted across diverse direct care contexts, particularly in times of complexity, uncertainty, and systemic change.
- **Critically examine current tensions and emerging directions in the field.** Participants will engage in dialogue around key issues shaping child and youth care, including education, practice responses to youth mental health, and the balance between experiential and cognitive approaches.
- **Generate collective insights and practical applications.** Participants will co-create ideas and strategies to strengthen relational practice, supervision, and leadership within their own organizations and communities.

An International Panel of experienced Child and Youth Care practitioners, educators, researchers, and leaders dedicated to advancing relational practice across diverse contexts. Drawing on a wide range of lived experience, scholarship, and leadership within the field, the committee collaboratively curates and facilitates learning spaces that reflect the core values of connection, dialogue, and shared knowledge. Their work is grounded in a commitment to strengthening the CYC community through inclusive, reflective, and practice-based approaches that support both emerging and established professionals.



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