

# Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

Volume 28 Issue 1 Spring 2015

## Guest Editors

Thom Garfat

Leon Fulcher



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TRANSITIONS

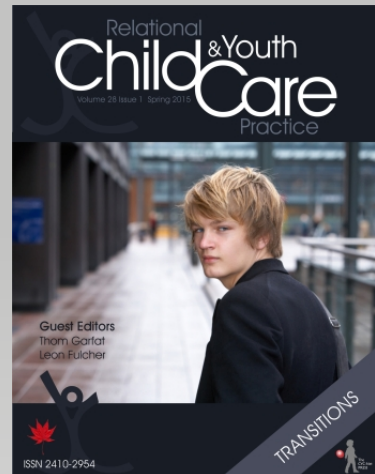


# Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

In this, our first e-issue of *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* we would like to formally acknowledge the fine work of **Carol Stuart, Grant Charles, Jack Phelan** and **Liz Laidlaw**. Beginning with this issue, Carol, Grant, Jack, and Liz have left their roles with *RCYCP* – each after making significant contributions to our structure and distinctiveness. We thank each of them. To Carol – thank you for incredible vision and leadership and for fostering the identity of *RCYCP*. To Grant – thank you for sharing critical insight and always setting the bar high. To Jack – thank you for your wisdom and passion for Child and Youth Care practice, and to Liz – thank you for fashioning our systems and creating a sense of team across the miles.

It takes the time, efforts and the intention of many to grow and develop a worthwhile endeavor. *RCYCP* has indeed been fortunate to count Carol, Liz, Grant and Jack amongst our ‘many’.

While we will miss the participation of these four remarkable people in their former roles with *RCYCP* we do look forward to continuing to hear their voices in new ways.



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## Relational & Youth ChildCare Practice

(formerly *The Journal of Child & Youth Care*, established 1982) is committed to promoting and supporting the profession of Child and Youth Care through disseminating the knowledge and experience of individuals involved in the day-to-day lives of young people.

This commitment is founded upon the belief that all human issues, including personal growth and development, are essentially “relational”.





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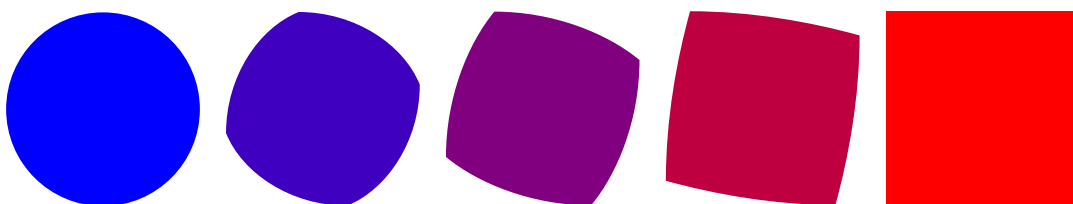
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# Changes and Transitions

**Thom Garfat and Leon Fulcher**

**As new generations enter the field, child and youth care workers will increasingly rely on smartphones and tablets.**

**T**here are times in history when change just happens. Child and youth care work is like that. Sometimes, change is forced upon us. At other times, we push ahead with change because it seems the right thing to do. While planning this first new issue of the e-journal of *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice (RCYCP)*, we were included in an exchange of emails concerning a future home for the personal library of Professor Henry Maier – our friend and mentor, and a significant influence in the

development of our profession. It transpires that no university, college or private library is in a position to store paper and books anymore. The move is towards electronic and digital libraries. So the story of Henry's library books offers a useful metaphor. As new generations enter the field, child and youth care workers will increasingly rely on smartphones and tablets – world-wide! So making *RCYCP* directly available on the tablets of every child and youth care worker in the field is sud-

denly a possibility. Four Issues in the annual subscription available directly onto your smartphone or tablet for \$2 or 3 a month! See elsewhere for information on how to sign up!

As we make the transition from being a paper journal to an electronic journal, there are many changes afoot – even as we remain the same in terms of quality, appearance and dedication to the field. Perhaps one of the most important of these is our new Editorial Team. We use the word 'team' intention-

ally because our new *Managing Editor*, Heather Snell, is focused on working collaboratively with the Editorial Team, with the Editorial Advisory Board and with everyone involved with *RCYCP* as we make this transition. Yes, the word transition was used intentionally as it is the focus for this, our first e-issue of *RCYCP*, Volume 28.

We feel ourselves fortunate that Heather, who is a Professor in the Child and Youth Care Program (and also the Program Coordinator) at Humber College, Ontario, Canada has come on board as our new Managing Editor. After many years working with the competent leadership of Carol Stuart, we believe that Heather will carry on the traditions and enhance even more, the efficiency and effectiveness of *RCYCP*. Ontario has always been a strong supporter of Child and Youth Care, and of *RCYCP*, and with her many connections within the academic network, as well as nationally and abroad, Heather will be well positioned to help *RCYCP* respond to the needs of the field. Heather is already familiar to many within the global CYC community.

Joining Heather, as our new *Editor*, is Rika Swanzen, from Monash University in South Africa. Rika replaces Grant Charles, from UBC, who

has given much to *RCYCP* over the years. Rika is a Senior Lecturer and Course Coordinator, for the Child and Youth Development programme at Monash in Johannesburg, and is someone who has formed many national and international connections within the Child and Youth Care network. Rika's appointment as Editor for *RCYCP* telegraphs our intention for *RCYCP* to be engaged in the larger global Child and Youth Care network, an initiative whose time has come. We believe Rika is just the person to help us make this transition from a national journal to a journal more capable of serving the child and youth care field worldwide. She, too, is familiar to many in the global CYC community.

As we, Thom and Leon, have worked with Heather and Rika – and of course with Martin and Carina in Cape Town – to make this transition and to produce this first e-Journal issue, we have been struck by the dedication, professionalism and commitment of all the members of the team.

So, thanks to everyone who has led us in the past and thanks to those who will lead us into the future.

We look forward to sharing this transition together.



### **Thom Garfat, PhD**

is the co-owner of *Transformation International* and the co-founder of *CYC-Net*. Information about Thom can be found [here](#).



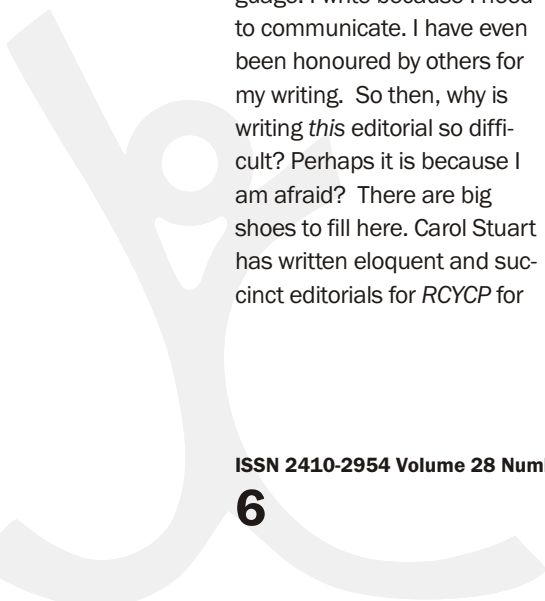
### **Leon Fulcher, MSW, PhD**

has worked for more than forty years as a social worker in residential child and youth care work, and as foster carer in different parts of the world. As a practitioner, supervisor, manager, researcher, scholar and author, Leon has given special consideration to working across cultures and geographies, how this impacts on team working, supervision and caring for caregivers, as well as promoting learning with adult carers. His practice aims involve making moments meaningful in the lives of children and young people whilst nurturing and promoting developmental outcomes that matter for them and their families, wherever they live.



# The Certainty of Being Uncertain

**Heather Snell**



**W**hy is writing this editorial so difficult? I write every day. I write as part of my job – and not just emails and jot notes. I write in full sentences, with paragraph structure – paying attention to grammar and syntax. I write because I enjoy language. I write because I need to communicate. I have even been honoured by others for my writing. So then, why is writing *this* editorial so difficult? Perhaps it is because I am afraid? There are big shoes to fill here. Carol Stuart has written eloquent and succinct editorials for *RCYCP* for

years; before and during her term as Managing Editor, *CYC* practitioners and writers such as Thom Garfat, Gerry Fewster and Leon Fulcher have challenged *RCYCP* readers with their skillfully written prose. Perhaps I am intimidated? Perhaps I am worried? Unsure and uncertain? What if I am not up to the task? What if I make mistakes? Will my effort be good enough? These questions hover over the keyboard every time I begin and consequently I have procrastinated – always finding other tasks, other more definitive, con-

crete jobs that needed doing. Jobs with more secure outcomes. Things I know I can do because I have done them before.

Ironic, isn't it; that in my first editorial paragraph for an issue entitled "Transitions" that I should be so insecure. I am not certain of the outcome here, as I have never done this before. The task looks familiar but feels strange and I am unsure of my efforts. While I may be uncertain of my 'self' at this moment, I am certain this is what it feels like to be in transition – not an unusual state



for Child and Youth Care practice! Children, youth and families in care often experience uncertainty and insecurity about what will happen next. Practitioners face similar anxieties every day, even every hour. In a culture driven by goals, measurable outcomes, and 'defining moments' our work can feel unpredictable, volatile and even ambiguous; that is the nature of transition. In the face of this ambiguity it is tempting to reach out to create structures, make predictions and set goals; to create measurable, detailed objectives or rely solely on the road maps of others for our transitional journeys. And yet, it seems to me that transitions need to be more about where we are in the moment, and less about where we think we are going next. Typically when we are in transition we are headed toward a destination that is completely new or even unknown to us – one that we do not even recognize until well after we arrive.

I clearly remember the day I said goodbye to my daughters as they began their post-secondary studies. Before getting into the rental truck and beginning my long journey home I sat for a few moments watching parents playing with their young children in a water park. Very

young children. I had just said goodbye to 'my children' – who were now independent adults. I remember asking myself, "How did I get here?" Surely it was only a few years ago when I was in a park very much like this splashing and playing with 'the girls'? How did this happen? Honestly, I do not have the slightest idea. I knew I had arrived in this new state called 'empty nesting' but I had no real idea about how I had gotten here, and even fewer ideas about what to expect in this new territory.

Transitions can be surprising and unsettling. It is no small wonder, as the word transition is an adjective, an adverb, a verb and a noun. As an adjective it describes a given *relationship* between two terms. As a noun it describes a *process*. *Relationship and process* – sounds like a description of CYC practice. The word transition comes from the Latin *transitivus* implying passing over or passing through. This suggests it is a state of being *in-between* but does not imply that we are necessarily aware of our starting or ending points. As we reflect it may seem that a transition was sudden, but most often transitions themselves are not abrupt. The events that set us in transit such as a birth, separation, trauma, celebration, or death may be

sudden but the process of transitioning as we anticipate or respond to these events typically occurs more slowly through time. Contributors in this issue grapple with the elusive temporal nature of the transitive state. Frank Delano and Jill Shaw write about the process of 'becoming' a supervisor in practice noting this transition is one of long term development implying growth, and motion. "Moving along the road" is how Delano and Shaw describe transition. Chelan McCallion uses a similar allegory as she describes how young people 'move on.' Like Delano and Shaw, McCallion gives us the travelling metaphor – imagining a transition as a journey along a roadway. This image not only suggests that transitions take time, but also describes transition as a dynamic state. Even if we are not aware of it at the time, transitions require work, action and engagement. A transition is a process and not an event or journey's end. As such, McCallion reminds practitioners working with young people in transition to be wary of using words such as termination, discharge, or endings as these words focus merely on a final, static and prescriptive destination rather than on the active circumstances of transition.

Focusing not on the jour-

**In a culture driven by goals, measurable outcomes, and 'defining moments' our work can feel unpredictable, volatile and even ambiguous; that is the nature of transition.**

ney but on the destination can also lead to professionalized normative concepts of success. Nancy Marshall and Paul Tragni document this as they describe the impact of diagnostic labelling and deficit based assessments on the transitional process of young people. They hypothesize value-laden language such as 'success' or 'failure' may cause us to focus on the achievement of a preordained status rather than the strengths of an individual or their unique transitional process. Think what is lost when the changes and challenges experienced by a young person are reduced to a phrase such as "readmission" or "unsuccessful attempt at independent living" This is particularly true when supporting young people as they transition in or out of care settings. When we focus solely on the transitional outcome being a change of address, we limit the possibilities for young people and risk setting them up for failure. This is particularly true as we respond to demands for evidence based practice. There are times when we seem to be constantly measuring and mapping young people against some 'next' stage such as independent living, home visits, developmental norms, or sixty day reviews. I believe reflective assessment

and thorough documentation is vital to our work. However I am dismayed by the implicit assumption that a young person 'should' be somewhere else and that our role is to 'get them there'. Leah Erlich, James Freeman and John Paul Fitzpatrick observe that being in transition is a worthwhile state in and of itself - a state rich in potential yet fraught with triggers calling out for keen observation, reflection and individual support. It is in transition that we actively create, observe and respond contextually. I suggest that as CYC practitioners this is where we, and the children youth and families we work alongside spend most of our time - in transition. Erlich describes the endless possibilities of this state beautifully in her use of mathematical graphing imagery; picture those "little arrows" that represent an infinite line. Infinity does not begin or end; like us, it is travelling everywhere at once exploring potential and sometimes heading off in unanticipated directions. Sometimes these directions inspire us, and sometimes they frighten us; sometimes the direction looks familiar and we leap toward it, while at other times the landscape is so alien we retreat, procrastinate or act out in fear.

Because transitions can be anxiety provoking, there

can be comfort in goals that describe a concrete destination – an end to the unknown. But caution is needed when we follow this path in order to avoid foreclosing on future possibilities. Sometimes pursuing a detour can lead to opportunities we did not anticipate. Transitional paths rarely run in straight lines and often lead to multiple destinations. Erlich suggests if we embrace transition as a nonlinear and dynamic state there may be infinite opportunities. Ruby Whitelaw writes about transitions as being connections and endless possibilities. Rika Swanzen and Birgitta Stay describe transitions as opportunities for finding meaning. Maurice Fenton muses that the "crisis of transition" also holds an "opportunity for growth". Clearly in any transitional state there are multiple routes, multiple opportunities for detours, or improvisation, and multiple potential destinations. Marshall and Tragni describe how young people can be marginalized when their transitions are conceptualized as a movement only between two preordained points. Jack Nowicki and Althea Pestine share how a focus on structured achievement levels in programming does not assist young people to navigate their own way. Often these

levels, like points on a predictable graph, are meaningful to professionals but have little context, necessity, or significance to young people and their transitional experience. Max Smart and John Digney warn us to “better understand that there is more to ‘transition’ than just a move from here to there.”

Nowhere is this warning better illustrated than in Maurice Fenton’s discussion of developmental contextualism which clearly demonstrates how context and agency bring events and challenges “into focus for adolescents at different ages.” Surely if we are sensitive to nuances such as these we will realize not only does every transition have the capacity to be different, but also that our ability to navigate one transitional period does not predict our journey through the next. It seems timely then, as we transition the format of Relational Child and Youth Care Practice, that we also examine our personal and professional thinking about transitions. Transitions are a time of uncertainty but this is integral to their function. Contributors to this issue remind us that there are times in our lives when it is best to be uncertain. As practitioners it is apparent that we do not work with the

transitions of others, rather we are *in* transition with them. And to do this we need to share knowledge, build relationships, trust, spark curiosity, guide and facilitate rather than dictate one direction forward.

With this frame of reference, I return to the insecurity I expressed in my opening paragraph. I am confident now that uncertainty is exactly what I should be experiencing as I transition into this new role, as the Journal shifts to a new relationship with the CYC-Net Press, as we build a new editorial team, and as we explore our new electronic format. This is a time for imagination, and thus one of ambiguity. It needs to be so. If I was to plot the events in the history of our journal on one of Leah Erlich’s magical graphs I would see a series of possibilities connecting Gerry Fewster, Thom Garfat, Leon Fulcher, and Carol Stuart. I would also see other points of linking between Relational Child and Youth Care Practice, practitioners, educators, young people, families and communities. As a profession we understand that being in transition does not mean being alone. I take that to heart as I finish this first editorial; I feel connected in new ways ... and a lot less afraid.



### **Heather Snell**

*is the Coordinator of the Bachelor of Child and Youth Care degree program at Humber College in Toronto Canada where she teaches and works collaboratively with students, faculty, CYC practitioners and young people. Heather's eclectic background draws her to work in the 'in between', where disciplines merge, relationships are built, and alliances can be forged. Over her career she has worked in community youth and family programs, supported young people and families involved in litigation, and developed youth centred expertise assisting young people with acquired brain injuries. Heather has worked with families to create bereavement outreach alternatives, and worked as a human rights ally. She has been recognized as an expert witness in child development; has authored several practical books, and produced the Many Faces of CYC video. She is a mom to two artists from whom she continues to learn daily. Heather is a member of the Ontario Association of Child and Youth Counselors and sits on the Canadian Child and Youth Accreditation Board, where she chairs the Research Committee.*



I turned 68 recently (now you know why these columns are called 'Twilight Reflections'). I think that makes me an 'old guy' but I haven't experienced that yet. Should I? Am I resisting the experience of transitioning to old age? Will it suddenly descend on me at a moment when I am unprepared for it? Or, perhaps, I am just wrong in thinking I should be experiencing myself differently.

I think I have done many things right – is 'right' the right word? I saved for my old age, moved to a house more appropriate for old folks, visited my doctor to talk about aging, read up on the afflictions of the older folks, stopped lifting big rocks, and all that stuff. So, I think I have prepared well – except for one thing – the experience I was expecting to have has not happened yet.

So, I wonder if I am in denial – although, I must confess, sometimes when rising from a long stretch at my desk, I do 'feel different' than I did 30 years ago. And I do notice that those rocks I placed in the garden seem to have gained weight since I put them there (soaking up water from the ground, no doubt). But these are only physical 'experiences of differentness', as my friend Kelly Shaw likes to say.

It is the emotional, psy-



## Expectations and Experiences of Transitions

chological part of this transition which has me wondering. Why don't I 'feel' older? I keep thinking I should be experiencing myself differently on something other than the physical level – although my friend Brian said the other day that we were a couple of grumpy old men – 'speak for yourself', I thought, while knowing there was some truth to what he was saying ☺

I must confess, I sometimes wonder if I was somehow 'set-up' for an experience that will not happen when I expect it to, or when others tell me I should expect it, or maybe not at all (although that is surely wishful thinking). I do remember, as a youngster, thinking about how terrible it must be to be old and that expectation has been reinforced by some older people who were definitely not enjoying their experience. But then I had the experience of my mother

who grew, thrived, and evolved joyously as she was aging. Add to that the experience of my grandmother who was always ready to head off to the pub with me when I showed up at her door when she was 88. So, I have models of people being alive and vibrant while complaining little about the experience of aging. But still the 'expectation' persists.

Again I must confess, I suspect that my 'expectations' were shaped by people who taught me when I was young and who, likely, had never experienced that to which they were referring. In other words, my expectations of experience were shaped by people who had no experience about what they were talking about at all.

I think that, perhaps, we sometimes do not realize the power we have to create expectations in the young which, when the time arrives, is experienced differently



than the expectations we helped to create and which they now experience differently than we had helped them to believe.

Perhaps never is this more evident than in transitions, or the expectations of transitions.

Let's think for a minute about all the transitions that 'youth in care' might experience:

- from being out of care to being in-care
- from one place of living to another
- from feeling normal to feeling 'abnormal'
- from being in care to out of care
- from being dependant to being 'independent'.

Well, the list could go on, of course, as a reading of this issue of RCYCP demonstrates. But here is something else I wonder about: are our predictions of what they might experience realistically helpful? How often do we set young people up to have one experience and then they walk out and have a different one: even things as seemingly simple as a young person changing schools. "It is an opportunity to start over", we might say and then off they go to experience the same thing they experienced in previous

school placements.

And then there they are – having a different experience than they were led to expect. Just like me, right now. I am wondering, with the benefit of time, 'is what I am experiencing normal, or is there something wrong with my experiencing'?

We move from one way of being, living, experiencing, to another – transitions we might call them – we transition from one way of being in the world to a different way (or potentially different way) of being in the world. But are we realistically prepared – by ourselves, or by others? And when what we experience is different than what we thought (or were lead to believe) we would experience, what do we do with that conflict between what we expected and what we experience?

When I was younger that kind of dissonance would cause me to 'freak out' – act out, act on, try to make things make sense. Now that I am older I try to go 'oh, well, we will see' but it doesn't always work.

I do wonder, sometimes, how much we contribute to the *trauma of transition* when we help to create expectations which never come to pass. Like when we say 'it will be okay' but it isn't. Or like when we say 'it will be better',

and it isn't. How much *transitional trauma* do we help to create when we make these comments? And why do we make these predictions, create these expectations, when, really, we have little idea about what the young person might experience? Because for each it is different.

I know, I know. It is because we want to be helpful, to be reassuring, to stimulate hope. But what if what we are doing does just the opposite? What if we are helping young people to expect experiences which they will not have? What are the implications?

I wonder sometimes if we should not just shut-up about what we think a young person might experience during, or from, a transition. I wonder if it might not be best to say something simple, like 'I have no idea what it will be like for you, but here are some things people have shared with me' – and then share positive, negative and neutral experiences, while all the time emphasizing that all of them are 'normal'.

I wonder, if I had not developed expectations of what it is supposed to be like to be old, if I would be experiencing it differently.

But, then, these are just twilight reflections.

Thom

information

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Material should be submitted by email to [rcycp@cycnetpress.cyc-net.org](mailto:rcycp@cycnetpress.cyc-net.org) in standard word processing format (eg. .doc, .rtf). Formal articles should not exceed 20 pages in length and should include an abstract of no more than 150 words. This material and referencing should conform to either APA or Harvard format (go [here](#) for guidelines). Author-date citations should be used within the text and a double-spaced reference section should accompany each article. In all submissions, authorship details, including brief biographies (no more than 100 words) and digital photographs should be included.

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