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Relational & Youth
Child Care
 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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Beneath the Sticky Mud

Heather Snell

*What if even one person remembered the soul by name?
And what if even one person came seeking
that which all others had given up on...?
What if even one person remembered
that under the hard earth in the darkest time,
new life is ever growing its hands, its feet, its eyes, its voice,
readying to be born again”*

Excerpt from the foreword of
Art and Upheaval: Artists on the Worlds’ Frontlines
by Clarissa Pinkola Estés

return to this foreword by Clarissa Pinkola Estés when I need hope. In the text, Ms. Estés paints a picture of grief and pain, describing the impact trauma has on the body - hardening us against the world. She describes the way we can feel buried by life - our identities, our sense of self, our culture and even our heritage covered by the earth and trapped underground. And yet, Ms. Estés suggests this darkness can incubate new hope; from the earth new life can spring.

The 2018 World CYC Conference, “Nurturing Hope” was held in January, in Ventura, California. At the time, the local landscape was transformed; forest fires and mudslides

had scarred the terrain. In this context, the guiding concept of “Nurturing Hope” seemed highly relevant, as both a feeling and a concept. While Child and Youth Care practitioners go by many titles and names, and work in diverse settings, they meet the challenges of nurturing hope in the life spaces of young people, their families and communities every day. This involves expectations and desire. It often means imagining what the future might look like.

The articles in this issue challenge us to imagine alternative futures. The writing, research and first-person narratives sharing this issue might feel a mudslide – a chronicling of normative oppressive practices and troubling gaps in services. Beverly Jean Daniels not only examines relational praxis through the lens of racism but deepens this experience in her first-person narrative “Today I tried to Go to School.” Carys Cragg begins her examination of post-structural youth work practice by asking us “Where are you coming from?” and Sewsens Igbu and Christine Baccus consider intentional relational practice as it might be if only it were guided by critical theoretical foundations. It feels ‘sticky’ when Igbu and Baccus ask to imagine “How would our relational practice transform if we operated from a theory of humanness as opposed to a humanity that is intentionally designed to be exclusive?”

However, the sticky mud dries and under this ‘hard earth’ there is hope. The authors in this issue “come seeking that which all others have given up on.” Against this landscape, I turn again to Ms. Estés’ poetry as a hopeful description of Child and Youth Care practice

–

*“the hard work of hauling, lifting, heaving
the dragging, sharing and best guessing
about what might be needed next –
without ever knowing for certain beforehand –
but often enough, trusting spirit,
and being en puente, exactly right
about what is needed exactly right now.”*



Heather Snell

has been involved in Child and Youth Care practice and education for over 30 years. From direct care in a variety of settings to CYC education Heather's practice and approach is often eclectic, drawing her to the 'in betweens', merging disciplines, and supporting collaborations. After teaching and coordinating the CYC and BCYC programs at Humber College for many years, Heather is currently part time faculty with both the Ryerson University CYC undergraduate and graduate programs, and with the University of Strathclyde MSc in CYC. She is also a member of the Child and Youth Care Education Accreditation Board where she chairs the Research Committee.

SAVE THE DATE



Talk-Listen: Centering Youth Wisdom in Group Work at Peak House

Bhupie Dulay, Stefanie Krasnow, Vikki Reynolds and Graeme Sampson

“Drugs just took over. But I was always there — hidden somewhere. I just needed to find the old me again. Peak House was the place I could do that”

Serina

Abstract

The Talk-Listen group is a therapeutic group at Peak House that exemplifies a set of ethics, values, and practices, which aim to center and uphold youth wisdom. In this article, transcripts of Talk-Listen groups are utilised to illustrate therapeutic practices that aim to co-construct relational safety, address the contexts in which struggles exist, illuminate resistance, and weave a sense of belonging, connection and hope amongst youth. These practices create the foundation on which youth wisdom can be recognised and witnessed. Through the demonstration of youth wisdom in practice, this writing also explores the importance of recognising the following in therapeutic work with youth: resistance to oppression as wisdom, the ways that youth laterally mentor and uphold one another, true collaboration and client-centered practice, transformation and change, and the ethical requirement of amplifying hope.

Peak House

“I’ve never had a space like this before ...”

Perry

Peak House is a live-in program for youth ages 13 to 18 who are struggling to reclaim their lives from substance misuse and oppression. This program is known for its history of creativity in therapeutic practice, and for its efforts to provide a welcoming space for youth of all cultural backgrounds, genders/gender expressions, and sexual orientations. Peak House utilizes a narrative-informed, collaborative approach (Anderson, 1997; White & Epston, 1990; Madigan, 2011) when working with youth, their families, and communities. This ethic of collaboration manifests as a spirit of *walking alongside* youth on their journeys as opposed to a paradigm of *treatment*. During a young person's stay at Peak House, the entire staff team collaborates with them through ongoing dialogue, negotiation, exploration, and solidarity work. Any professionalized knowledge that staff hold is decentered to make space for youth wisdom, creativity, and insight. By doing so, youth become the centre of the work. Because Peak House is a group program, centering the youth refers to individual youth *and* the group of youth as a whole. Centering youth in this way requires fluidity, flexibility, and moral courage.

Peak House has been, quite literally, co-created by the youth who have walked through the doors over the past 30 years. Wisdom and feedback from youth are directly incorporated into practice. The program guidelines, therapeutic practices, and environment at Peak House have all been shaped primarily through the contributions of youth over time (W. Wittmack, personal communication, April 10, 2012). There is a long history of collaborative and innovative therapeutic practices emerging from Peak House, of which the Talk-Listen group is only one. Many staff have written articles to share these innovations with other communities (Dennstedt & Grieves, 2004; Reynolds & Kelly, 2018; Sanders, 2007). The Talk-Listen groups owe much to the rich history of reflecting teams¹. The Talk-Listen group, like the program as a whole, enacts the co-creation of Peak House culture. In this therapeutic group, youth co-create a *safe-r* (Bird, 2004; Reynolds, 2011), collaborative space within the house by sharing and honoring one another's stories, celebrating their therapeutic work, and acknowledging the ways they each contribute to one another's journey. Many youth have let us know that such practices often extend beyond the Talk-Listen group and influence the group culture at Peak House as a whole. For instance, youth who are newer in the program have expressed that being invited into

¹ The origination of Reflecting Team practice begins with Goolishian's Family Impact Teams (MacGregor et al, 1964), the work of the Milan Team, (Boscolo et al., 1987), the work of Tom Andersen (1991) who gave this specific practice its name, and especially Michael White (1999). Anderson and Jensen (2007) dedicated their expansive book *Innovations in the Reflecting Process* to practitioners in what they called the reflecting process movement.

Talk-Listens helped them feel safer to open up and share their own stories in other contexts.

An Overview of the Talk-Listen Group

“I’m proud of myself now for realizing all this and I’m also really grateful that there’s people here I can talk to about that.... I don’t know how you did it here, but you showed me, so I’ll try and do what Peak House did for me for someone else.”

Christy

The Talk-Listen is a structured group that aims to uncover, enrich, and intentionally honour youth wisdom. Structure is used to provide safety and a unique therapeutic environment. The Talk-Listen is a type of witnessing group (Reynolds, 2002) where youth share their expertise, wisdom, and insight. Talk-Listen groups usually occur closer to the end of a youth’s stay at Peak House and/or after a significant piece of therapeutic work has been completed, as a sort of rite-of-passage ceremony. To this end, the Talk-Listen group tracks and honours the changes youth make in their lives. This witnessing transforms the stories of change into stories of wisdom and legacies that extend far beyond the individual youth themselves by virtue of being witnessed by a group.

The Structure

The format of the Talk-Listen group is divided into three parts: one youth and therapist have a conversation [the Talk-team], then the rest of the youth and a second therapist [the Listen-team] have a conversation about what they heard from the Talk-team and how it impacted them, and finally, the Talk-team has a concluding conversation about what it was like to hear the Listen-team’s reflections on their first conversation. In general, the Talk-team and the Listen-team do not interact with each other directly. This provides a linguistic space for each team to listen and witness the other without needing to respond in the moment. Such structure allows youth the opportunity to experience the impact they have on others, which is significant for youth whose voices and experiences have been silenced or marginalized. Even though the Talk-team does not directly address the Listen-team, their presence is acknowledged and named to ensure safety, since a young person and a therapist would have a very different conversation if they were talking alone as a dyad and not being witnessed by a larger group. Though the Listen-team is not

directly spoken to by the Talk-team, they serve a central role in framing, reflecting, and augmenting the significance of the conversation had by the Talk-team. Many youth report that this is their first experience of witnessing their positive impact on others while being witnessed for their own strength, courage, and wisdom. The therapist who facilitates the Listen-team's conversation works to gather points of connection, solidarity and resonance by asking questions to the Listen-team such as, "How does this relate to you?" and "What was it like to hear about [youth's name] journey?" The role of the Listen-team's conversation is to weave a sense of community, belonging, and connection (Reynolds, 2002). Youth in the Listen-team strengthen the story of change that the Talk-team discuss, learn from the wisdom shared, amplify hope, and build or strengthen solidarity.

The Purpose

I learned from Fae's Talk-Listen. Even now, later in my stay at Peak House,
I keep thinking, what would Fae do?

Cynthia

The Talk-Listen group is an intentional celebration of the hard work youth accomplish when renegotiating their relationships to problems and to significant others while at Peak House. The Talk-Listen group provides space for individual youth to be witnessed, respected, and listened to; at the same time, it provides the space for a group of youth to learn from and inspire one another. Youth are frequently told what they need to be doing by not only well-intentioned adults but by the systems that govern their lives. Youth are continuously told that their brains have not fully developed and that therefore, they are not able to make sound decisions about their lives. Our experience at Peak House has demonstrated that youth can not only make brilliant, significant, and logical decisions but also mentor and inspire other youth, if they are given a safe enough space to do so. Youth also look forward to Talk-Listen groups as they take pride in leaving a legacy or teachings behind. This is illustrated by Valerie speaking to the therapist, Vikki, about why she wanted to participate in a Talk-Listen:

Vikki: What is it about Talk-Listen group that was interesting to you?

Valerie: I just want to kind of get a message out there I guess.

Vikki: Do you have any hopes for what could happen in this conversation?

Valerie: I hope that people can relate to some of the things that I'm saying and hopefully something will occur to them or they'll have an epiphany. Best-case scenario someone realizes something they didn't realize before.

Valerie challenges the stereotypical assumption that adolescents are self-involved, as she discusses the importance of being a role model and creating change in communities:

Valerie: There's a lot of people that aren't here but people out there that I know that I'm really hoping they can follow my example. Like people that need help that I care about back at home. So even if in some way, one day they can hear my voice and see that if I can do it they can do it and for people here too.

Structuring Safety

I really appreciate everyone making it a safe space for me to be able to share stuff like that. Everyone is supportive of it and even if people don't have the same opinions of it as I do, they still give me space to say mine, which I really appreciate.

Christy

Creating (relative) safety in a group cannot be achieved by resorting to formulaic approaches. As described by Reynolds (2011), structuring safety is fluid, relational, intentional, and imperfect. The therapist is required to remain open to dismantling power while genuinely collaborating alongside youth. Before a Talk-Listen takes place, the therapist and the youth who is at the center of the Talk-Listen have conversations about whether they would like to participate in a Talk-Listen. In this conversation, they discuss what that process would look like, what they would like to focus on in the Talk-Listen, and what they want to refrain from discussing in front of their crewmates². This ensures that the youth is fully informed about the process before they enter the vulnerable space of a Talk-Listen group. All of the above is re-visited at the beginning of the Talk-Listen with a series of questions from the therapist such as, "What had you saying yes to the Talk-

² Youth at Peak House refer to their peers as "crewmates."

Listen?”, “Do you have any hopes for this conversation?”, and “How will you let me know that you do not want to talk about something?”

Part of structuring safety with youth is normalizing the process of saying “no” even and especially to adult authority figures, such as therapists. Below, Vikki discusses the importance of saying “no” and by doing so, Vikki acknowledges and fosters Valerie’s courage amidst a system where a youth’s “no” is routinely invalidated. Hearing a youth’s “no” ensures that we do not replicate the interpersonal, systemic violence that all too many youth experience:

Vikki: If I ask you anything that’s not cool, stop me yeah?

Valerie: Okay yeah.

Vikki: Okay and if I go anywhere you don’t want to go.

Valerie: Okay.

Vikki: Okay. Just so you know, you can say no to me.

Valerie: For sure.

Vikki: Jess always does. So do these four. *laughter* So just, you know because I might ask you a question you might not really want to answer, so think about that.

Valerie: Mmm.

Structuring safety in this way is essential for creating a space where youth can be vulnerable and authentic. When youth say “no”, this is in fact a very vulnerable, courageous, and in many ways, risky moment for them. Below, Christy says, “no,” by correcting her therapist, Graeme. Graeme hears the “no”, honours the teaching from the youth, decentres himself, and acknowledges her strength and courage. This type of genuine critique from the youth illustrates the presence of relational safety between Christy and Graeme:

Graeme: Your idea of what's useful, it sounds like that's really changed too.

Christy: Yeah, definitely.

Graeme: Like as a woman being useful. You're talking about speaking to other women and you're talking about breaking silence and you're talking about raising consciousness.

Christy: I think because I've really overplayed the term useful in my head, so it kind of pisses me off now to have to think about is this useful, is this not useful?

Graeme: Let's not cover it then *smiles*.

Christy: I go way too far in. I'd like to think that everything I say could be useful to someone somewhere even if it seems really pointless right now, you know what I mean?

Graeme: Thanks for correcting me on that, I appreciate it. And the other thing is, it must take a lot of courage and forgiveness on your part to have these conversations with men, like me, for example.

While honouring the teachings from the youth, the therapist also makes his privilege transparent and is accountable to that power.

Situating Struggles in the Social World

I feel like I am cared for at Peak House and that hasn't happened anywhere else in my life.

Cam

Talk-Listen groups highlight the importance of recognizing that all struggles exist relationally and within a social, political context – including and especially struggles with substance misuse. Struggles do not arise nor are they healed in isolation. A central aim of the Talk-Listen group – and the therapeutic approach at Peak House at large - is to expose and address the relational, cultural and systemic dimensions of the problems affecting the youth we serve. We intentionally situate youth's struggles in social contexts

where there are systemic oppressions and abuses of power that promote suffering. We resist locating suffering within the landscape of a young person's brain. This approach centers their wisdom - namely, their preferred responses to suffering, and their acts of resistance to oppression. Below, Graeme and Christy's conversation tracks the discourses that got in the way of her rights, beliefs and values, which makes space for Christy to reclaim her voice, and for her voice to be witnessed:

Graeme: [...] what's this process been like for you? To go from thinking this is normal, thinking to be used and disempowered is what's expected and going to, wait a minute, I have rights and I should be angry about all that.

Christy: Yeah, I guess it's something I've always known inside of me, but I never had anyone to say that to, and I never had a right to get mad about it, you know, 'cause in my life, I'm surrounded by a lot of men that hold power positions, so I never really thought that I had a right to complain about anything like that. So now realizing that I have a voice, and I do get to say stuff like that, is pretty awesome.

Graeme: It's been really powerful to be allowed to witness that.

Above, Graeme and Christy mutually acknowledge *both* the social constraints on Christy's life - the things she's been taught by patriarchy - *and* Christy's personal agency within these constraints - the way she's "always known." In this regard, Christy is positioned not as a passive victim of these social constraints but as an active agent in her own life (Brown, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). Youth have mentioned that being held up in this way supports them to embody their own values and preferred ways of being.

The Talk-Listen often goes a step further in acknowledging that it is the absence of cultural space for youth wisdom, youth resistance and solidarity that is the problem. Christy articulates how she feels isolated, not only from women in her life, but from her preferred meaning of women's culture. "Connections that are liberatory and preferred" (Reynolds, 2002, p.97) are eclipsed in Christy's life by patriarchal structures that pit women against each other. Christy acknowledges that those structures benefit from keeping women isolated from solidarity with one another, because if women banded together to "talk about the real problems" those systems could be more easily dislodged:

Graeme: You talk a lot about the ways society is set up and the messages women are taught, do you think that society doesn't want women to be talking to each other about this kind of thing?

Christy: Yeah [...] I have a lot of theories. [...] Women are always in a competition for the attention from the men and that's one of the ways to turn women against each other, so they don't team up and talk about the real problems.

Locating problems in contexts helps youth not only to separate from the struggles they experience but also to find connection and belonging with others who stand alongside them in relation to these struggles. The therapist continually enacts an ethic of belonging (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012) by making points of connection amongst the youth visible and relevant. Here, Graeme speaks to the conversations between young women at Peak House, and the impact that experiencing this connection to community can have:

Graeme: What kind of a difference has it made being able to have conversations with other women, like, here for example, or...?

Christy: [...] it is kind of sad because I know I'm not the only person that goes through this. You know, it'd be a lot easier if I just went through the shitty time, but [...] this is a real problem in the world we live in and I think most of the female-identified people that came into Peak House have had this problem on their own. I've talked about it with them. So, on the one hand, it's heartbreaking but on the other hand it's also helpful because it's empowering, because I don't have to do it myself. You know what I mean?

Youth Wisdom

Wisdom is often recognised synonymously with age. Ageism erases the wisdom that youth carry. Adults working with youth can easily replicate ageism and dismiss the insight, strengths, and abilities of youth. Youth often find themselves silenced or are taught to doubt their own voice and knowledge. In this way, ageism teams up with many other systems of oppression that silence and invalidate youth's wisdom. The Talk-Listen group is a space where this is deliberately resisted and reversed: youth voices are centered, and elevated. In Talk-Listen groups, the therapist seeks to acknowledge and affirm

youth's ideas, perspectives, experiences, and insights as wisdom. The group environment creates a space where youth's wisdom is validated and witnessed for its ability to transform not only a single life, but the lives of others. The Talk-Listen thus involves youth hearing their own knowledge and wisdom reflected in the knowledge and wisdom of their peers. Youth tell us that being honoured for their wisdom instills a sense of pride that challenges and usurps any negative stories about their identity inherited from the dominant discourse about youth who struggle with substance misuse.

Celebrating Resistance as Wisdom

Drugs, the media, and others have written our story for us. Here [at Peak House], we challenge that, we rewrite our stories. We become the authors of our story.

Byron

Resistance of oppression is often pathologized to discredit, dismiss, or silence it (Coates & Wade, 2007). Youth resistance to power is frequently pathologized or dismissed through language such as “non-compliance” or “disobedience.” In the Talk-Listen, we intentionally challenge and reverse this by witnessing, recognising, and acknowledging youth's behaviours as acts of resistance to power and oppression - in fact, we recognize that young people's behaviours often exemplify creative, compassionate, and ingenious tactics of resistance. We acknowledge this resistance as part of their work as youth, particularly as they will be inheriting the struggles and turmoil in the world created for them by us adults and our predecessors.

We also recognize the many ways youth have developed strategies of resistance in order to survive or to protect and care for others in their lives. We see youth resistance as the way youth seek to protect their (or others') safety and dignity, rather than seeing it as an inconvenience to adult agendas. In fact, many youth express that being “othered”, or being forced to conform (for instance, regarding sexual orientation, gender expression, creative or spiritual identities or practices) is often part of what led to problematic substance use in their lives. Below, the therapeutic conversation tracks the systemic oppressions that caused the pain, isolation, and self-doubt in Christy's life, which substances then took advantage of:

Graeme: You've talked before about how you trust yourself now, and how that's been huge for you. [...] you've been talking about society and we're talking about structures that are sexist and patriarchal... do you think that there's anything in there that has people, particularly female-identified folks, not trusting and second guessing themselves?

Christy: I think people talk about this as a problem that used to happen, but it's actually a problem that still happens and women are kind of, a lot of the times, made like they [...] shouldn't have opinions [...] so most times when a woman tries to speak up about something like this, they are just like, "Oh, you hate men, you hate this and blah blah blah," so, I think [that] makes people quiet about it. [...] a lot of this is stuff I've wanted to talk about, but [...] drugs have had a huge role in [...] making me not want to do it and [...] scared to do it [...] drugs kind of quieted my opinions inside myself so I didn't care to have to ... you know what I mean? [...] So, I think taking that away, I had a lot bottled up that I wanted to say for a long time.

Graeme: So, would you say that drugs really teamed up with all this stuff that you're talking about in society? [...]

Christy: Well, for myself anyways, it's like, because I didn't feel like I was useful in other ways, but when in the "drug world" I could do things. Drugs made me hold onto the thought of being useful to someone. I was useful to men when I was using. I guess holding on to that because I didn't want to lose that, I didn't want to go back to being not helpful, not useful, and small.

Throughout the Talk Listen, the therapist challenges the myth that people choose their struggles with problematic substance use to support youth's resistance to oppression. The therapists work to highlight the wisdom, knowledge, ability, and intelligence that youth carry with them that is often pathologized, problematized, or minimized, especially in youth (Reynolds, 2011; Richardson & Wade, 2008). By deliberately witnessing these acts as resistance, space is created for the youth to recognize and appreciate their own power. For example, once space has been reclaimed for Christy to remember her own wisdom and power, the story of her knowing herself begins to be strengthened, alongside the story of her resistance of ageism, patriarchy, and misogyny:

Christy: I think it's weird that I have these ideas 'cause I never used to be opinionated like this, but now I have a lot of opinions and I actually say them.

Graeme: But you also said that you had a knowing about this for a long time.

Christy: Yeah, it was in me somewhere, but I just didn't know how to talk about it, and I kind of beat myself up, like I shouldn't think like this, like, "Oh I'm in the wrong for thinking this," but then coming here and learning more about it, it's like, actually it's not me that's at fault. [...] It's not my fault these problems are here.

Graeme: It's hard to speak out when you don't have a lot of people to listen to you, right?

Christy: Yeah. I mean, even a lot of the women in my life don't see it, and that's not their fault either, it's just they're part of a system, but it sucks. It's hard not to be able to talk about it, like with my mom, with my aunt, or... you know what I mean?

Youth as Lateral Mentors

To be in a program with a bunch of other youth with different views.
I don't think I'd be able to do it on my own. Everyone is supporting each other here [...] and that's the biggest thing.

Halle

In the Talk-Listen, youth take positions of "lateral mentoring" (N. Arthur, personal communication, March 1, 2010), whereby they build relationships of solidarity around shared struggles, form alliances around means of resisting or healing from these struggles and inspire one another in the telling and witnessing of their stories. This matters in particular as the alliance, solidarity and inspiration is created among, for, and by the youth. Corey illustrates the impact of being in solidarity and community with people in their journey through Peak House:

Corey: Christy was really quiet when I first got here and she was still kind of figuring things out for herself. And just how far she's come in almost nine weeks that we've spent together. Holy shit. Yeah, she wanted to love herself and have respect for herself and to

let people know if something that we're saying is bothering her. If she doesn't like something we're talking about she'll be like, "Don't talk about that."

Bhupie: To the point where she even did it to Graeme. Isn't that amazing?

Corey: And nine weeks ago she wouldn't have done that [...] and now she advocates for herself and she's aware of what people are saying and how it shouldn't be a part of society. She stands up for herself now, and that's something that's truly admirable.

Youth as Professional Collaborators and Change Makers

We learn our work on the backs of the youth we serve. The youth we have the privilege of working alongside show great courage in opening up to us and are generous when sharing their knowledge. As discussed previously, Peak House believes that youth are the experts of their experience. In Talk-Listen groups, the therapists work hard to deconstruct power by ritualistically giving *youth wisdom* the prestigious, centered space that professionalized knowledge usually occupies. Youth often express having had contrary experiences to this in their lives; they tell us that their knowledge, if recognized at all, is seen as less-than, where they are positioned as passive receptacles for the superior knowledge of adults. Through the Talk-Listen, we hear, honour, acknowledge, and celebrate not only youth's wisdom in their own lives, but their contributions to our work at Peak House and the world at large:

Vikki: So, I'm just hoping that Christy listens to your wisdom; this is so hard won from your life and from your work here. It makes me so proud to be part of Peak House. I'm just super moved and I think it's because I've been here for over 20 years and seen so many women devastated by men's violence and seen so many young men get caught up in this and it's not what they want to be doing either, so this really fed my hope.

Bhupie: I remember when she was just starting to talk about some of these things and you and I looked at each other, we're like, "What?! That's amazing!"

Vikki: That's the shit!

Bhupie: Right? This is stuff a lot of folks take a lot of time to figure out.

Carol: Christy has changed the community at Peak House from being able, with bravery and courage, to do this Talk-Listen. This will be a gift for them to look at. And if we change our communities, it's one step to changing the world. Yeah, I'm super honoured and feel, similar to Vikki, that these are the young people, these are the young women, that are coming up. The world is in good hands [...].

Vikki: And also what she's saying about everybody here has made that space. So, there are young men and gender variant folks who aren't stopping young women from speaking.

In the above transcript, the youth's contributions are witnessed and valued as truly transformative, not merely supplementary. Bhupie, Vikki, and Carol, a youth counsellor, acknowledge and honor the impact of youth wisdom by celebrating youth legacy, the ways their wisdom carries forward and comes to shape how we serve others in the future.

Centering Transformation

I thought I would take time away from drugs and it wasn't really anything.
That I would go back to using after and then I realized that I can actually
change my life around.

Leo

The Talk-Listen was created to center the youth's transformation and to provide a format where the group can acknowledge the impact that those transformations have on others: including the youth's peers, the therapist(s), other staff, and the Peak House community at large. While the real effects of substance-misuse and oppression are richly acknowledged, the therapists work hard to decenter problem-talk and center the incredible change and transformations that the young people make. By centering the conversation on the transformation rather than on the struggles, the therapist creates a space to challenge the cultural discourse about youth, particularly youth struggling with substance misuse.

The lived experience, abilities, qualities and values that the youth have, which they mobilize to resist oppression and dominance - are rendered visible and intentionally appreciated. The therapist makes these qualities visible by asking questions like: (1) How

did you make this change? (2) Why was it important for you to make that change? - which get at strengths and values respectively. The therapist also asks questions that reveal the impact that change has on their lives, families, supports, and communities.

Amplifying Hope

In addiction there is no hope so as soon as you're out of it you start to get like a little glimpse and if you feed it – it gets bigger and bigger.

Kora

Talk-Listen groups magnify, engender, and inspire hope. Youth's wisdom, insight, creativity, and brilliance fuels hope all around, for both youth and staff. We believe that we hold an ethical obligation to hold onto that hope and bring it forward. As illustrated below, Nora describes the hope that she feels for herself knowing that another person (Christy) went through a similar journey:

Bhupie: You're talking a lot about the analysis and for her to be able to forgive herself and others. [...] How does that change your perspective on things around?

Nora: Because I struggle a lot with society and its ways of influencing women, it tells me that recovery will get a lot better when I kind of void that out of my mind and not let it brainwash me and push it out because I realize it's a lot of what women struggle with in addiction and it's a lot of what drags them in. So, I like how she completely switched it around, not only with words, but actually did the work herself to do that. It kind of shows me that I can do that, and if I do it, it'll be so much easier for me.

With the current opioid crisis, hope can be difficult to hold onto with so many people dying from overdose. Hopelessness isn't caused by the youth that come to Peak House. Hopelessness is caused by the systemic social and political conditions that exist and harm our youth (Reynolds, 2011). Hope is uplifted when youth create change, and this is precisely what is centered and highlighted in all Talk-Listen groups:

Vikki: This gives me hope that things can change for young women, young men, nonbinary, and gender variant folks. Things don't have to be the way they've been.

Bhupie: [...] These are the moments that make me feel like there is a reason why we have this space here for young folks. They already know the answers, it's just giving them time and space to do it, and how much difference it will make in the world if we do that.

Conclusion

Youth wisdom is the foundation of the work at Peak House. Youth experiences, insight, expertise, skills, abilities, intelligence, and wisdom created the culture at Peak House and this culture fosters innovation, transformation, and hope. If provided safer spaces, youth will continue to inspire and create change.

It's pretty cool to think that you don't have to fix the whole world to make change.

Christy

Dedication

We would like to thank all the youth who have entered the doors of Peak House over the past 30 years. Without your willingness to share your experiences and expertise, this article and many other practices at Peak House would not be possible.

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It is important to name that, as the authors of this article, we are not the knowledge holders. The youth, their families, and communities of supports, have a fundamental role in shaping our work at large, including the specific practices described in this article. In particular, we want to honour the youth whose voices are at the center of this article, who bravely shared their experiences and wisdom with us. All youth names printed in this article have been altered to protect confidentiality. We utilized multiple transcripts for this article, which we have permission from the youth to use for these purposes.

This work and writing occurred on the ancestral lands and traditional territories of the Musqueam, Skxwu7mesh-ulh Uxwuhmixw (pronounced Squamish) and Tseil-Waututh nations, which were never surrendered.

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is a Registered Clinical Counsellor with a Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology. She was a Clinical Counsellor with the Peak House team for over five years. Currently, Bhupie works as a therapist and supervisor, and provides consultations and workshops/trainings to non-profit organisations. She practices within an anti-oppressive, intersectional, and collaborative approach. It is important to Bhupie to honour and allow the strengths, wisdoms, and lived experiences of those she works alongside to guide the work. She is also an instructor at Vancouver Community College and an adjunct faculty at Adler University.



Stefanie Krasnow

is a clinical counsellor on the team at Peak House. She believes in the profound transformations that are possible when professionalized knowledges are decentered to make space for wisdoms that are rooted in cultural locations of belonging, religious/spiritual worldviews, creativity, or personal experiences. This orientation brought her to Peak House, a residential program for youth that upholds and privileges youth wisdom. She has an MA in Counselling Psychology from Adler University and an MA in Liberal Studies from The New School for Social Research.



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is an activist/therapist whose experience includes supervision and therapy with peers and other workers responding to the opioid epidemic/poisonings, refugees and survivors of torture, sexualized violence counsellors, mental health and substance misuse counsellors, housing and shelter workers, activists and working alongside gender and sexually diverse communities. Vikki is an Adjunct Professor and has written and presented internationally on the subjects of 'Witnessing Resistance' to oppression/trauma, ally work, justice-doing, a supervision of solidarity, ethics, and innovative group work.



Graeme Sampson

is privileged to be a part of the clinical counsellor team at Peak House. Along with the Peak House team, Graeme works collaboratively with youth and communities, offering practices rooted in narrative therapy, liberation psychology, witnessing and anti-oppression work. He is honored to witness and learn from the unique strengths, courage, creativity, and wisdom of each young person, and is grateful for the hope and inspiration that youth bring to this work. Graeme completed his MA in Counselling at Adler University, and has a background in childcare and youth work.

around and about

Suffer the Children

Garth Goodwin

Today, September 7, 2018, speaking in Illinois in his first campaign response President Obama stated the obvious that many in the so-called free world have accepted for some time now: “These are extraordinary times. These are dangerous times.” The last twenty-one months since Election Day have been an endless descent into the realization that the most incapable president in American history is blind to his personal limitations and deep under water when it comes to even the most basic expectations of his office. There has been a perceived concurrent descent in the general body politic with the Congress being viewed as having abandoned its oversight responsibilities. More to the point of this column there has been a reactive and incremental personal descent as well, that had this columnist indulging in pythonesque social media ranting that went on for some months. Finally, I settled on the term ‘trash’ to refer to the President as it was a nice twist on his name and yet clearly summed up my assessment. And then it all went too far and 2654 refugee children were incarcerated and separated from their families with many having their trauma compounded by total lack of process, forced separation, comments and taunts by authorities. This President who could lose it when Syrian children were gassed had pulled a total 180 and ordered the separation of innocent children from their parents on American soil, an evil act of an evil man. Then it finally dawned on me this was the President of the United States of America and how a lifetime of respect, fascination and active following had come to this. This column explores aspects of that history in both personal and general considerations.

One of the most remarkable things about Donald Trump is how isolated he is and has been for much of his life. He has always been a background player on the news scene because he forced the issue often with his marriages, business dealings and opinions, none of which had much relevance in a substantial sense to his country. In his reality television show he was there to welcome competitors, set up the contest and then

returned at the end to sit in a chair and fire the looser. All the heavy lifting was done by others. When he did hit the campaign trail, he did so in one of the most superficial, safe and luxurious ways going. No rubber necking or staying overnight in a supporter's home for him. He would fly in on his jet. I saw it drive by on the tarmac at LaGuardia once and it was as menacing as it was impressive, being black. He would land in the target city to roll that jet up, framed by the hanger doors. Inside his screened audience waited as he emerged to take the stage and deliver an entertaining rant that tapped into years of resentment, rage, and racism. I talked with his supporters in South Carolina who attended his rallies and who were laser locked on him. It hit me that Trump had no clue as to their reality, having never had to leave his bubble in the sky. As President all he has done is assume one of the most secure, comfortable and convenient bubbles there is in the White House and Air Force One. It could be argued he sees the world from 32,000 feet routinely. He quite literally is one of the most superficial persons in the world, never knowing genuine human relations, history, interests, imagination; any of the things people strive for, educate for and express. All he wants is the attention and the applause. Yet ironically much of this is denied him by a public who views him as so toxic that performers did not come forward at his inauguration, honorees' threatened to boycott the Kennedy Centre Gala and the family requested he not attend the Bush and McCain services, all typically events graced by a President.

Yet, he is viewed as a winner. The economy is humming along, judgeships are being populated and two seats on the Supreme Court are often viewed as achievements. I find it incredible that virtually everything the President has done, every choice he makes and every executive order he gives has a negative outcome, in my view, so much so it can be predicted. However, the zero tolerance approach to refugee children ended my investment in following Trump. Fear, force, and the bully approach define one side of Trump's approach to life. In this instance the belief was by separating parents and children that others did not want to have come to the US. The horrifying part was how quickly this order was acted upon, how incomplete the process was in tracking and how cruel and traumatizing it was made by some of those in authority. This was a moment of pure evil as vicious as the dispatch of 6 million Jews in World War Two in intent, although certainly not scale. As is often the outcome, a judge intervened and ordered an end to the practice and reunification of the families. 497 remain in custody at this writing with work going on to reduce the number. Of those 322 parents were deported, often after being tricked to sign away their children. The harm has been done, the trauma realized in many

instances. My first thought was of the Boston Bombers and other mass killers, the majority of which were American born second generation offspring. I also recalled that I am a child of early separation; an experience that has coloured my life with a preference for permanence and attachments to nature, beauty and yes, politics. The latest plan is to lock up families indefinitely to get around time constraints placed on the incarceration of children and the scandal of separation. A recent bill in Congress seeks to settle the outstanding separated families by reversing the order and granting the families refugee status. Government departments are being drained to provide the millions necessary to grow the facilities to accept and essentially quarantine families and the thousands of parentless youth who cross the border on their own.

There was an incredible moment of relief which acted as a reminder that there are definitely positive moments in this bleak time. It came on a playing field in an annual indulgence of pretend that takes place at the Icelandic Festival in Gimili, Manitoba each summer. Folks from around the world gather to celebrate Viking heritage with a respectable number who re-enact the Viking experience striking a camp with a King, warriors, and all the things they need to feed, shelter, clothe, defend and entertain. Each afternoon, a mock battle is staged to display the weapons and noise of battle in a large grassed area with an outer and inner range. It ends with a remarkable scene in which children are invited up to be Little Vikings. The warriors step to the outer ring and place their weapons, shields, chainmail, helmets and so forth down in this neutral space. Everyone is issued small pool noodle like swords and given the simple instruction that when a Viking falls, he or she is dead and can no longer be attacked.

The Little Vikings were enthusiastic warriors and while it was all play this stood out against the horrors these migrant children faced and that children face around the world and throughout history.

One of the more welcome movements of this era is the emerging intolerance for the victimization of children. Gravesite discoveries in Ireland and Canada demand the sanctity of life and childhood be reinforced. The concept of childhood is a recent one, mid Victorian times for the upper classes and more generally a post war phenomenon involving the baby boom generation and beyond. It would not occur to me to attack an adult with anything, let alone a Styrofoam noodle, yet when you value children, revel in them and give them permission to be themselves you are rewarded with an immediate joy and the promise of a bright future.



President Obama also reminded his audience that Trump is not the cause but a symptom of unease with the massive social and global challenges of our time. The current President can lay claim to continuing a robust economy, stamping the court system with his preferred judges, and reversing many of the accomplishments of previous generations threatening his country and its people in the process. The bitterest pill of our times has been a tilt to the right and far right to maintain the status quo in the face of extreme social change with the realization that the Presidency could fall to such an individual. There is a pattern of the electorate wanting a difference - any difference - to politics as it has been practiced. That pattern is spreading across the globe and bubbles up within countries. In America there was immediate resistance to this and where possible through court, state, and private action to confound or stymie policies. The US leaving the Paris agreement was met with enough state and corporate involvement to



continue to meet targets and for Michael Bloomberg to pay the American share of the required contributions. There are numerous examples of this throughout America and now it is emerging from the White House itself. The fact of the matter is that this trend has impact and success in several countries now and maintains its attraction to easy answers forced on constituents. It is driven by fear. We need to remind ourselves of Franklin D. Roosevelt's take on fear. The children seen above will need every advantage to face and confront the world they will grow into. They will see species disappear; oceans rise and extreme weather harm life on earth like never before. No amount of protectionism will save them as these are global and natural forces. Child and youth care

practitioners work at the coalface with the young. For those who have the privilege of a more holistic and long-term connection, let them know they matter and that collectively we need them all to matter. It is a curious thing that, on that precious bit of tablespace behind the President in the Oval Office, pictures of his parents sit over his left shoulder as if witnessing his Presidency. Most chose to place their immediate family in such frames. It is intriguing to contemplate that if Donald Trump had mattered more to his parents this need to command an audience and bid for daily attention from a place of isolation and emptiness would have the genuine foundation and goals most Presidents have demonstrated.



Garth Goodwin

retired after a 41-year career in both practice and as a database designer and administrator. Over 30 years of frontline practice he worked for both public/board and private agencies. He was the first recipient of the National Child and Youth Care Award in 1986. He nurtured the Child and Youth Care Workers Association of Manitoba through its formative years and became its representative to the Council of Canadian Child and Youth Care Associations. He has been privileged to be the witness and participant in significant events in CYC history and remains active as the communications support to the Council.

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