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Contents

Editorial

Aligning managerial practice with the values of relational Child and Youth Care practice

Werner van der Westhuizen

In this edition of *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice*, the theme is centred around how a relational approach could be embedded in the values and culture of the organisation and how this would show up in management and leadership. While a relational approach is widely adopted by Child and Youth Care practitioners, there appears to be some dissonance between the adoption of a relational approach to direct work with children and families and the organisational environment and management structures that should support this approach.

I was privileged to attend this year's Unity Conference in Dublin and to co-present a breakout workshop on the impact of organisational trauma on an organisation's ability to adopt and support a relational approach to practice. My co-presenter, Coenraad de Beer, argued that a relational approach to Child and Youth Care practice remains unknown or misunderstood in many parts of the world, especially where the development of the Child

and Youth Care profession has been slower than other parts of the world, resulting in little formal recognition of the profession and its practitioners. Often, those in management and supervisory positions have their background in political, managerial, education or other social sciences and lead a Child and Youth Care organisation with a limited understanding of the complexity and depth of Child and Youth Care practice, especially from a relational perspective. This can result in a disconnected relationship between managers and practitioners, which may lead to power struggles and general job dissatisfaction.

Child and youth care practitioners work in a wide range of settings, but almost always in situations where children and young people have experienced adversity, trauma and loss. Inserted into the everyday lives and routines of these young people, practitioners offer safe relational spaces and experiences within which young people can experience some sense of normality and live fulfilling lives. Creating therapeutic environments and healing relationships require personal risk and investment on the part of the practitioner, since such relationships are not created without authenticity and genuineness, and it is therefore also a vulnerable task. This is something that can only be created and sustained when practitioners themselves feel safe and supported in their work. As Laurel Downey explains in her article, organisational procedures and management styles must complement the practice values of Child and Youth Care practitioners. Without support and supervision that is aligned with the values of principles of relational practice, practitioners may experience the dissonance of having to create safe relationships for others without experiencing it themselves; ultimately this risk takes a personal toll on the practitioner who may withdraw from the deeply personal connection that children and young people need to thrive, resulting in superficial and disconnected care. Nicia de Nobrega and colleagues further expand on this theme by providing real practice examples of how mentoring and management can be aligned to relational practice characteristics.

Managers also have a difficult task in that they must negotiate the needs of many different stakeholders, including funders and policy makers who often have their own demands. They must ensure compliance with legislation, financial accountability,

responsible utilisation of resources, development, and management of staff and ultimately, quality care for children and young people. There is no doubt that this role requires a specific set of competencies for managers to be effective. But in the end, what remains clear is that to provide the relational care and safety that children and young people need, Child and Youth Care practitioners must also experience safety and support in their role.

The contributors of this edition explore a wide range of aspects related to relational Child and Youth Care management and set the stage for exploring how relational Child and Youth Care practice can become deeply embedded in the leadership and management cultures of organisations.

Coenraad de Beer emphasises the importance of the manager's role in strengthening a relational Child and Youth Care approach in the prevention of and response to safeguarding incidents in residential care. He makes us aware that safeguarding responses that are highly procedural and process driven risk having the opposite effect to its intention and actually be harmful to those involved and proposes that a response that is based on the principles and values of relational Child and Youth Care practice is the most effective means of preventing and responding to these challenges.

Michelle Briegel explores how a relational Child and Youth Care approach can be utilized in the mentoring of Child and Youth Care practitioners. She builds a foundation for such an approach by highlighting the person-centred roots of relational practice and exploring its connection with attachment theory in the development of human bonds and links it with the mentoring relationship. From the origins of person-centred and attachment theories, a relational Child and Youth Care approach supports the mentoring relationship as it parallels this approach in practice. Michelle then continues to explore some very practical strategies for the use of a relational Child and Youth Care approach in mentoring.

Edwina Poynton, Shane Murdoch and Leon Fulcher explore the challenges of reconciling service-centric needs with the care needs of children and young people. The demand on managers to demonstrate compliance with funder expectations often mean that children and young people are no longer central to the very services designed to

meet their needs. It is therefore important to clearly define and record the developmental achievements of young people through a functional outcome approach that gives meaning to the voice of each young person. The Outcomes that Matter (OTM) recording tool was designed for this purpose and provides practitioners with a way to record developmental outcomes in a way that tracks the developmental achievements of young people and encourages them to participate in the process. OTM addresses both the needs of funders and policy makers for performance measurement and compliance as well as the needs of practitioners and young people for a strengths-based participatory method to hear their voices and support their development.

Laurel Downey describes the management ethos of Catalyst child and family services at which she served as the CEO before its closure in 2022. Organisational procedures and management styles must complement the practice values, especially when they are therapeutic and trauma-informed, rather than focus on control and compliance. Laurel describes some of the challenges that Catalyst experienced, as well as the impact of organisational values on the work with young people, describing the importance of a values-led leadership. She emphasises that management teams must embody the core values to create and maintain purposeful and caring relationships, for children and staff. Laurel continues to briefly describe the Spiral to Recovery practice framework as a relational model of care that was adopted by Catalyst and expresses hope for the revival of good therapeutic care and pro-social organisational values.

Nicia de Nobrega together with twelve contributors reflect on the experiences of mentors who adopt a relational Child and Youth Care approach to their interactions with mentees. They explore stories and experiences of mentorship and relational management and discuss the themes that emerge from their experiences in the context of the 25 characteristics of relational Child and Youth Care practice to demonstrate how mentoring and management can be aligned with relational Child and Youth Care practice principles.

Kelsie Tatum Martinez explores how "we are all in this together" by sharing the advice she received from her manager while travelling, which made her aware of her responsibility to care for her staff so that they can take care of the children. She explores some of the foundations of this advice, including attachment and basic needs; just like

children and young people need a secure based from which they can explore the world, supervisors and leaders should promote experiences of security and safety for workers and directly model how to create relational safety. She also explores the process of rupture and repair - just like practitioners must attend to these processes when caring for young people, supervisors and leaders must be mindful of rupture and repair in their interactions and relationships with staff.

Finally, Hans and Kathleen Skott-Myhre take us on a thought-provoking journey that challenges us to reflect not only on what we do, but also who we are. Throughout our lives, our experiences involve various forms of supervisory relationships which dictate social norms and expectations, and we cannot easily separate ourselves from these lived experiences. Hans and Kathleen suggest a less hierarchical framework within which collective care can emerge; a collaborative and horizontal approach encourages creativity and capacity instead of disciplinary and control and is therefore more in keeping with the spirit of relational practice. Such a shift requires a radical rethink in which external control and structure gives way to an egalitarian value system.

Thank you to the authors for their willingness to explore this theme and invest their time and effort to make this edition happen. I hope that readers will find something that speaks to their own practice situation.

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Managers' role in strengthening a relational Child and Youth Care approach in preventing and responding to concerning and offending behaviours within alternative care

Coenraad de Beer

Introduction

Managers of alternative care programmes carry a formidable responsibility for the care, protection, development and well-being of children and young people who lost parental care. This role is even more demanding and complex in preventing and responding to adult-on-child, peer-on-peer and child-on-adult concerning and offending behaviours, especially in a context where violence in alternative care settings are in focus and where historical and current cases of abuse continue to make news headlines across the globe. Serious safeguarding incidents that involve concerning or offending behaviours by children, young people or adults, including staff, often trigger a crisis management approach which paradoxically increases the risks of harm with sometimes devastating consequences for those affected by abuse. Serious safeguarding incidents and the associated responses contributes to organisational trauma, which, if left unabated, could lead to policies, procedures and practices that break up relationships, disempower Child

and Youth Care Practitioners (CYCPs) and waste opportunities for restoration, recovery, healing and learning for children and young people. This article explores how managers of alternative care programmes can strengthen a relational Child and Youth Care approach in the prevention of and response to safeguarding incidents involving concerning and offending behaviours. For this article, the author would mainly refer to concerning and offending behaviours, instead of safeguarding incidents. Safeguarding incidents is a technical term often used in association with procedures and processes. Using the terms 'safeguarding incidents' to describe harmful concerning and offending behaviours risks taking the focus away from a relational Child and Youth Care approach and response.

The profile of alternative care managers

The profile or range of tasks for managers of alternative care programmes varies according to the specific environment within which they operate. Globally, these operating environments in countries differ substantially. It ranges from countries with robust child protection systems and regulatory frameworks where managers should hold a professional license or certification in Child and Youth Care, clinical social work or as a professional counsellor, and where operating costs for programmes are primarily secured through government funding. These programmes are usually well-resourced. On the other end of the scale, there are countries with weak or non-existent regulatory frameworks and where operating costs for programmes, which are poorly resourced, depend on private funding from local sponsors or funding partners abroad. In these instances, the managers of alternative care programmes often have a bachelor's degree in business administration, education, or community development with experience in fundraising, marketing, human resources, financial management, community development or humanitarian aid. The daily programmes and tasks that require managers' time and attention are determined by the environmental factors they must navigate to ensure the smooth operation of their alternative care programmes. Globally, alternative care managers' exposure, knowledge or experience with relational Child and Youth Care varies significantly and should not be taken for granted. Their profile and environmental factors in the country influence and shape how managers respond to concerning and offending

behaviours and manage crises. For this reason, much more attention should be placed on supporting the learning and development of alternative care managers in relational Child and Youth Care practice and approach. This article will explore five reasons why alternative care managers should strengthen a relational Child and Youth Care approach to prevent and respond to concerning and offending behaviours.

A Relational Child and Youth Care approach responds to the situation of children and young people without parental care

Children and young people without parental care often experience trauma due to neglect, violence and abuse within their families. They are also more likely to be exposed to multiple care placements. As an unfortunate consequence, children and young people with unresolved trauma often develop alternative coping skills to navigate the dysfunctional or unstable environments they find themselves in (SOS Children's Villages, 2020).

Some alternative coping skills may be expressed as concerning and offending behaviours towards their peers or adults with whom they are in contact with. This includes the inability to form secure attachments; withdrawal from social interactions and isolation; difficulties with regulating emotions, mood swings, anger outbursts or emotional numbness; aggressive reactions towards peers or adults to what may be an everyday life situation and self-destructive behaviours, including self-harm, substance abuse or risky sexual behaviours (SOS Children's Villages & CELCIS, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to recognise that in the context of interpersonal relationships within alternative care settings, children, young people or adults are more likely to overstep perceived or established boundaries. It is also essential to recognise that in certain situations or contexts where harmful actions or behaviours occur, children, young people and adults may transition between different roles – from being the person initiating harm to becoming a victim of harm or simply being a witness to the events (SOS Children's Villages, 2022). This dynamic adds another layer of complexity in preventing and responding to concerning and offending behaviours in alternative care settings.

While concerning and offending behaviours can happen, it is vital to be clear that they are not excusable or acceptable, especially when they involve harm to others. Moreover, recognising that harmful behaviours might occur should not lead to complacency or acceptance of such behaviours but instead to a heightened awareness of the need for prevention and an appropriate response with an approach tailored for children and young people without parental care.

Children and young people without parental care who have experienced trauma require empathy, understanding, and appropriate support. A relational Child and Youth Care practice approach precisely offers that (Nolan & Gibb, 2018). It involves recognising trauma's impact on behaviour and creating safe and supportive relationships and environments that promote healing and recovery. This is achieved in the life space of children and young people with Child and Youth Care Practitioners (CYCPs) where children and young people experience and live their lives. They use life moments or events, including situations that lead to concerning and offending behaviours, as opportunities for learning (Garfat et al., 2018). It includes opportunities to purposefully connect with children and young people who are initiators of violence and to reflect on their behaviours, how they could respond differently, manage their emotions, recognise accountability, help them understand the impact of their actions on others, and work towards restoration (Nolan & Moodie, 2016, p. 21). To achieve that, time and consistent quality relationships between CYCPs, children, and young people are crucial to breaking the cycle of violence and preventing further harm.

Procedural and process-driven safeguarding policies and procedures could cause harm

Organisations have a range of policies and procedures to guide staff on responding to concerning behaviours and safeguarding incidents and clarify expectations, steps and roles on how to respond. Decision-making on concerning or offending behaviours is incredibly complex and influenced by various factors. Evidence suggests that the impact of safeguarding policies and procedures that are mainly procedural and process-driven could cause harm when they are overly focussed on rules, regulations, and risk mitigation, which can create an excessively bureaucratic and restrictive environment not

conducive to a relational Child and Youth Care approach working with traumatised children and young people (CYCJ, 2022; The Independent Review, 2020). Procedural and process-driven safeguarding policies may help manage crises but risk disempowering local teams, especially CYCPs, and numb down flexible and individual approaches that could respond to unique situations in diverse contexts. As governments, organisations and donors are confronted with safeguarding crises, the urge is to strengthen procedural and process-driven policies and policies with little reflection on how they impact direct work with children and young people on a day-to-day basis.

In a procedural and process-driven environment, CYCPs tend to focus more on compliance than on their commitment to the well-being of children and young people. This can result in a "check-the-box" mentality rather than a genuine investment in creating relational safety. CYCPs may be reluctant to engage in authentic, open relationships with children and young people if they perceive that the safeguarding policies and procedures prioritise punitive measures over learning and relationship-building. This fear can lead to CYCPs maintaining an emotional distance. In turn, there is a risk that children and young people may experience a lack of emotional support and nurturing if CYCPs feel constrained by rigid policies. This can negatively affect their mental and emotional well-being and hinder their healing and developmental progress. CYCPs may also experience burnout if they are continually caught between the demands of procedural and process-driven policies, responding to the in-the-moment life situations working with traumatised children and young people, and their desire to provide individualised and emotionally supportive care (The Independent Review, 2020)

Keeping accurate records is another challenge for managers and their teams in a procedural and process-driven environment. Many of the peer-on-peer, adult-on-child or child-to-adult incidents are not isolated events but are instead part of a broader pattern or timeline of events and circumstances. In safeguarding investigations, investigators often find that organisational records on safeguarding incidents and associated responses are lacking or limited. This begs the question regarding record keeping: What is enough, especially for CYCPs? CYCPs have demanding and time-sensitive responsibilities in providing direct care and support to children and young people. This

makes it challenging to find the time for detailed, accurate and reflective record-keeping, especially in resource-poor environments. However, not having records is not an option, as it may have harmful consequences for children, young people and CYCPs during safeguarding investigation processes. Managers can address these challenges by ensuring supportive policies and procedures that streamline documentation processes, ongoing training and professional development, access to user-friendly documentation tools, and a supportive work environment that acknowledges the importance of record-keeping while recognising the demands of direct Child and Youth Care work. For example, short recordings or short videos of CYCPs themselves describing a situation, event, incident, history, context, decision, or response can be a valuable alternative or addition to written records. Of course, due consideration should be given to privacy and data protection and how those recordings are stored.

Managers can support more appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures by aligning with relational Child and Youth Care principles, which recognise the importance of building positive, trusting and nurturing relationships between CYCPs and children and young people in alternative care. When developing or revising safeguarding policies and procedures, managers should collaborate and seek input from children, young people, and CYCPs and involve individuals with experience in the field and a deep understanding of relational Child and Youth Care principles and practices. This includes safeguarding investigations as well where managers could incorporate trauma-informed principles and practices into investigation procedures and processes. Regular reflection on relational Child and Youth Care principles with all staff, not only CYCPs, can emphasise the importance of respecting the dignity and autonomy of children and young people while maintaining appropriate boundaries. Managers should regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of safeguarding policies and procedures on the well-being of children and young people in care. As Nolan & Moodie (2016, p.30) found, professional judgement and sound decision-making in complex situations require "a positive, well understood, shared, supportive, and respectful organisational culture and ethos developed through open debate, challenge and negotiation. This type of shared organisational culture may have

more power in day-to-day decision making than the presence or otherwise of a policy or procedure."

Procedural and process-driven safeguarding approaches contribute to criminalising children and young people in alternative care

In recent years, several studies have explored the factors leading to the criminalisation of children in care. For example, the Howard League for Penal Reform (2017) in the United Kingdom found that sixteen and seventeen-year-olds in residential care face a staggering statistic – they are at least 15 times more likely to be criminalised compared to other children of the same age. This means they were convicted, received final warnings, or faced reprimands for often minor incidents which would never have come to police attention if these took place in families. The consequences of the criminal justice system's involvement for children and young people in care are that it can lead to a criminal record, placement changes, such as moving the child to a more secure or restrictive facility, disrupting the existing care relationships, creating feelings of abandonment or rejection, and ultimately further reducing opportunities for children and young people in care to heal and develop effective coping skills.

There are three commonalities in approaches to prevent the criminalisation of children and young people in care (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2017; Department for Education, 2018; State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, 2020; Independent Care Review, 2020; CYCJ, 2022). First, the recognition that most children and young people enter care due to neglect, abuse and violence within their families and that the impact of this trauma causes additional vulnerabilities in their emotional and behavioural development, often leading to concerning, abusive and offending behaviours. Secondly, the settings of alternative care programmes and the procedural and process-driven responses by staff to concerning and offending behaviours contribute to unnecessary police involvement and the criminalisation of children and young people in care. Thirdly, a relational approach by alternative care programme staff supported by the criminal justice system is central to preventing the criminalisation of children and young people in care.

It is complex for alternative care staff, including CYCPs, to determine how to respond to concerning and offending behaviours as various factors, dilemmas, contradictions, and tensions must be considered (Nolan and Moodie, 2016). For example, there is a tension between preventing children and young people in care from spiralling into more offending behaviours and involving the police as an option of last resort. For staff in particular, it is a balance of their responsibilities to keep children, young people and staff safe and ensuring that young people take responsibility for their behaviours and the consequences of their behaviours. For example, according to CYCJ (2022) the involvement of the police in some offending behaviours is non-negotiable, for example, attempted rape, rape and acts of violence leading to severe bodily harm or attempted murder. However, there are many behaviours that are offences where alternative care staff can exercise discretion on how to respond, including, for example, incidents of violence between peers, threats of violence or harm, damage to property, or theft of property.

Therefore, managers of alternative care programmes must recognise a relational Child and Youth Care approach as central to preventing the criminalisation of children and young people in care. In several countries, the criminalisation of children and young people in care is not on the decision-makers' radar. There, it is the role of managers of alternative care programmes to establish good working relationships with the police and to raise awareness about these issues and facilitate exchange between CYCPs, the police, community leaders and the criminal justice system. Preferably, there is one contact person in the police for each alternative care programme. It also highlights the importance of an inter-sectoral approach to the prevention and response of concerning and offending behaviours among agencies and community partners, including alternative care programmes, schools, social services, donors, the police and social justice, to name a few. In this context, managers of alternative care programmes should encourage joint training with partners and cross-sectoral exchange.

A relational Child and Youth Care approach recognises children and young people as active agents in their environments!

In alternative care programmes, there are several advantages for managers to listen to children and young people and recognise them as active agents in their environments. Children and young people bring unique perspectives and insights into their communities and experiences. Especially into the dynamics of peer relationships and violence among their peers, their input on adult-to-child and child-to-adult violence should not be ignored. Therefore, managers should support child and young people-led initiatives to reduce violence and create opportunities for children and young people to shape strategies, policies and procedures to ensure they are clear, understandable, and relevant to their experiences. Children and young people can provide insights into what behaviours of children, young people and adults they consider acceptable or unacceptable and what consequences or restoration expectations they find fair and meaningful. Their input can help tailor responses and consequences to address the specific issues they encounter (SOS Children's Villages, 2022). It also builds trust between them and adults responsible for living policies and procedures. Children and young people may be more likely to respect and adhere to guidelines and 'house rules' they had a hand in creating.

In crisis situations, managers may be tempted to deprioritise listening to children and young people. However, recognising children as active agents in their environment when responding to concerning and offending behaviours is not only a matter of ethical and, in some contexts, a legal responsibility but also a practical approach that leads to more child-centred outcomes, which empowers them and promotes their well-being and safety.

A relational Child and Youth Care approach empowers Child and Youth Care practitioners (CYCPs) in their vital roles

CYCPs are typically the first to identify concerning and offending behaviours and take immediate action to ensure the safety of the children or young people involved. In crisis situations, managers may be tempted to micromanage the role of CYCPs, which poses significant risks and challenges to effectively handling such situations, especially where managers may not have the same level of relational Child and Youth Care practice

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Information

Relational Child and Youth 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".

Certain pieces in *RCYCP* have received peer review. However, we do not peer review all articles as we choose not to exclude those voices where peer review would be inappropriate or on request from writers.

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Relational Child and Youth Care Practice is committed to providing equitable and inclusive spaces that promote and support the global profession of Child and Youth Care through disseminating the knowledge and experience of individuals involved in the day-to-day lives of young people, families and communities. This commitment is founded upon the belief that all human issues, are essentially "relational".

Relational Child & Youth Care Practice welcomes submissions on all aspects relating to young people, families and communities. This includes material that explores the intersectionality of Child and Youth Care practice and the lived experiences of all who are engaged in Child and Youth Care practice. Considerations will also be given to interpersonal dynamics of professional practice and all submissions that assume a relational perspective. This might include topics such as cultural values, ethics, social policy, program design, supervision, education, training etc. Welcomed are also submissions that address advocacy, social justice and reconciliation practices within the diverse spaces and places of Child and Youth Care. Each issue may include refereed articles that comply with acceptable 'academic' standards; submissions contributed by regular and guest columnists; short pieces that describe particular relational experiences and reflections; poetry; artwork and photographs.

Material should be submitted by email to rcycp@press.cyc-net.org in standard word processing format (eg. .doc, .rtf). Formal articles should not exceed 6000 words in length (excluding references). Referencing should conform to either APA or Harvard format. 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 an abstract of no more than 150 words should be included, as well as a short list of keywords at the beginning of the article, a headshot photo and a short author bio of about 100 words to publish with your article. Importantly, authors should also indicate whether a peer review is required (in addition to the standard editorial review).

Although no article or submission will be rejected purely for stylistic reasons, the editors reserve the right to return any manuscript for additional work. Authors requiring editorial assistance in this regard should indicate their request in a covering letter. Originality of material is the responsibility of the primary author. Previously published material must be identified as such and will be published only where the necessary permission has been granted from the original source.

Relational Child and Youth Care Practice may include Peer Reviewed contributions, stories, case studies, thought pieces, experiential descriptions and other forms of writing which will not be peer reviewed. In this way we aim to strike a balance between the values of Peer Reviewed articles and experiential voices from the field. This is a unique approach and one which we feel offers the best of both. Peer Review is available on request.

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