

## **CHILD CARE BY THE YEAR 2000: CYBERCARE, COMMUNITY AND ELECTRONIC SYNERGISM**

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The Future is here, and, like it or not, profound changes are already happening which greatly alter how humans will relate, communicate and care for each other in the coming millenium. Those who care for children cannot afford to be left behind as these changes occur. We must be an integral part in this change affecting the entire species. To the average child care worker/practitioner, "high tech" seems, by definition, alien—a cold, mechanical digital world where the cherished values of caring, empathy and transcendent service have no place. In reality, quite the opposite is true: it is now the task of all in human services to be a part of this social transformation, lest that perception become reality.

We must assure that the exploration of Cyberspace and the uses of emerging technologies will be high-tech *and* high-touch. Without the synthesizing, holistic and humanistic touch intrinsic to Child Care, the new technologies cannot be fully humanized as they evolve.

### **Exploring Cyberspace: Computer Networks, Terms and Opportunities**

"Cyberspace" is not a place. Nor is it in space. It has been described as where a person "goes" when talking on the telephone: you are here *and* there with the other person simultaneously. Computers connected by simple telephone lines serve to multiply, intensify and accelerate reality. The resulting connectivity takes on world-wide dimensions.

With the advances and increasing affordability of the personal computer, what was once the domain of governments, corporations, universities and computer wizards ("hackers") is now opening to anyone with a computer, phone and a modem. A modem is a small device which connects computers to phone lines. It interprets the signals so they may go over telephone lines. Most computers today come prepackaged with communication software. Books abound on how to use them, and the movement is towards simplicity and ease of use, or computer-friendliness. In a short time the world of cyberspace can open up to anyone.

### **An Extremely Short Course on the Internet**

The Internet began as a US Government project, designed to link existing computer networks and facilitate data exchange between computer sites such as universities, government research facilities, and data storage agen-

cies. But, more important than knowing how the Internet ("The Net" for short) works, child care practitioners need to know what it offers and how to use it.

The most common use of the Internet is electronic mail or "e-mail." It works simply: first make a computer connection to a phone line (so much easier than even five years ago), then, join a network which has "Internet Address Capability," and a computer address is given to the individual. This is usually some shortened form of one's name, followed by the symbols and letters for the network itself. From that point, most every computer network in the world, including such as AT&T & MCI electronic mail, SprintNet, Compuserve and America-On-Line can exchange messages via computer. Prodigy is an exception, with no Internet capability.

### **Bulletin Boards**

The simple exchange of mail, as simple, fast and economical as it is, is compounded in the use of computer groups, commonly called "Bulletin Boards," "Conferences," or, on the Internet itself, "Newsgroups." There are literally thousands of bulletin boards around the world. They vary greatly in size, shape and calibre, just like any grouping of human beings. In cyberspace, discussions center around topics, with the name or user ID (identification) of the speaker, date and time of posting listed usually at the head of each message. Topics are posted on-line by either leaders of boards, or members. People then respond and add to the "discussion." In practice, when logging on-line the "voices" of all who have posted anything "scroll" before you on your screen. You can choose to respond or simply "lurk," meaning you are there but silent at the time).

Most all who venture into this experience talk of a sense of transcending time and space while on-line. Thoughts from persons all over the world seem to come into your own place and time, giving a sense of their presence, somehow, as you read their words. It is often, in better bulletin boards, the same sense of community felt in actual personal groupings ( called F-T-F, face-to-face" in on-line jargon).

The potential for the field of Child Care and Human Services seems obvious: We can create all manners of "virtual communities" in cyberspace. These communities augment and interconnect with our actual personalized communities. They also offer greatly expanded resources not bound by geography, both of practice wisdom, and peer support. Workers can communicate with workers in other facilities, create on-line support groups, or share information. In light of this, I offer a proposal:

## **The Metalogue Group : A Proposal**

In an effort to pursue this increased opportunity for connectivity in the world-wide field of child care, the *Metalogue Group* is being formed. Its purposes are twofold:

- The creation and facilitation of connectivity among human services and between child care practitioners, their colleagues, and the children of the world.
- The integration of “New Science” models, such as Chaos and Complexity theories, into the electronic Child Care and Human Service community of the next decade, and beyond.

### **Premises**

In this age of consumerism, hedonism and consummate materialistic individualism, I believe that there are millions of persons who still find great personal meaning in service to others. Unrewarded by high salaries and relegated to low social status, there exists a group of caring, giving individuals who work helping others in need. Often they feel isolated and suffer personally as a result of this career choice. By increasing connectivity and awareness through new technologies and paradigms, transcendent values and ideologies can be furthered and society better served.

The initial focus is not to create a political constituency, but rather to evolve support groups and mechanisms for those in these high stress and increasingly difficult, but necessary, social service fields.

Transformational insights into the nature of reality, human behavior and change, such as those found in Chaos and Complexity studies, can be spread and integrated into existing systems.

This process of networking will affect change and support through a web of individuals, rather than from existing governmental or academic structures.

### **Goals**

- Create and facilitate national and international connectivity within the broad spectrum of human services, yet across traditional disciplinary lines and focusing on all levels of service providers
- Use transformational systems and complexity / chaos paradigms

- Create and facilitate networks within the human services, both through conventional media and electronic networking
- Form a Virtual ThinkTank for the purpose of developing a Meta Model for Child and Youth/Human Service Work
- Create an international consortium of human service/child care experts who will be connected electronically. This consortium will be multi-disciplinary, preferably New Science in orientation, preferring holistic models. Some sort of electronic mentoring outside of present frameworks is envisioned
- Facilitate broad based apolitical national/international network of all in human service direct care work; client centered

### **An Excerpt from on-Line: Still Alive and Well Here in Cyberspace**

#### **Foreword:**

Practitioners who work with the harsh realities of residential treatment use many resources in order to cope with job-related stress. Virtual communities offer yet another alternative. The following essay was first written on line on the Meta Network, Meta Systems Design Group, Arlington, VA. It took place in a smaller 'private' conference, where members express themselves more freely and personally than in 'public' conferences.

Many dramatic events occur daily in the treatment process. One such occurrence, and its impact on the author, are expressed in 'Cyberspace' to an on-line group, much as one might share with colleagues away from the work environment, only electronically. The essay speaks for itself:

" Hello, all. I wrote this last night after a particularly trying stretch of days. It was a journal entry at first, but I felt I could share it here, so here goes:

Another day with the pariah. Another drama unfolds before me, one more poignant than any Sunday night movie, more real than any cinema verite. I am in it. It is swallowing me with its vividness and power.

I arrive home, again, totally spent. My wife seems far away though she is sitting next to me. She senses my different state; she has come to know it in earlier years. I sit eating my curry rice, home-made in the wok in the way only she can make it. Her smiling eyes and jokes begin to poke through my distraction. I know she is trying to comfort me, to 'cheer me up.' All I can say is " Can't you see I don't want to talk about it?" Being strong, and loving me, she knows it is not she I push away. She ignores my comment, and asks, aren't there any stories, any bright tales of the children you might tell me?" (I often tell stories over dinner, describing those precious gifts of themselves which the children give when they are being so totally without pretense. No stories tonight, only that image of rage unleashed, the question in the girl's

flashing eyes: 'How can those who should love me hurt me so badly?'

Looking out my own kitchen window, I begin to see more clearly. Across the table I notice her bright yellow shirt, with its deep blue collar and her brown eyes looking at me in hopes that I will look back in kind. Suddenly the words slip out of me: "The suffering of children, dear, the senseless anguish of children. That's all it is."

Still, Kay's visage stays with me: Her perfectly rehearsed 'biker' persona, the intricate tattoos (designed to offend), the excessive eye shadow, turned to a muddy, salty paste smeared down her cheeks. Her face contorts as she screams, "Those fucking people, my aunt and uncle! They kicked me out, chased me down the street, tried to kill me. . . told me I was shit, I would never be loved by anyone; shitman, I was only thirteen years old!" Suddenly, dead silence. Head in hands, she begins to sob, shuddering as she cries, for over thirty minutes.

When at last she stopped crying, she spoke in gushing torrents, rushing to put words to her pain, lest she seal up again before her hurt is all exorcised: . . . "I had only wanted to be myself. I was a good little girl, straight A's, joined all the clubs at school, did what everybody wanted, everybody but myself."

Kay's mother had left her when she was nine. The relatives who took her in hated her. They tormented her. They were never satisfied, even when she was perfect. So she chose imperfection - in grand style.

For three years she lived on the street, in and out of detention, shelters and 'rehab.' Last month she was reconciled with her mother, and herself had asked to be placed here, to live with us here in the Children's Home.

Now if we do our job, she'll learn she is lovable, and how to tap her rage for excellence. I must lead the way for her hope. And I shall.

Still, no matter how many of these I face, no matter how skilled I might be professionally in the moment with them, they haunt me.

It still hurts to see how many and how much our children are being hurt. I enter their field of pain, and can't help from time to time if I too get dirty, if I bleed a bit too much.

So I pause to join you in this 'Virtual Community.' I sit at this keyboard and express these feelings to you, a faceless group of friends in Cyberspace. Somehow, it helps me cope just by knowing that you are there, hearing me. Though this new form of human connectedness escapes my understanding of it, it still enables me to "meet" and "hear" your supportive responses at times like this.

What seems like a cold, inhuman machinery of switches, 'bits' and 'bytes' actually has become a warming electron ether in which we touch each other. I feel your presence. I thank you.

- Dana

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Please read the following carefully; conforming to these procedures greatly speeds up the review process and increases the likelihood of acceptance.

Articles submitted to the *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work* should be completely typewritten, double-spaced on standard letter-sized paper, with ample margins. Whether produced by typewriter or word processor, a dark, fresh ribbon should be used. Two copies should be sent. *FAX and e-mail* articles cannot be accepted.

It is strongly recommended that the article be produced on a word processor since, if accepted for publication, the article will be required to also be submitted on disk, to aid in the final editing and printing process.

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