

THE EVOLUTION OF A MODEL OF SCHOOL-BASED CHILD AND YOUTH WORK: AN ONTARIO PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board has employed Child and Youth Workers to help address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students within its elementary and secondary schools. A number of CYW roles have evolved. Additional educational jurisdictions in Ontario and other provinces have begun to utilize CYWs to deliver supportive services to students. This paper summarizes evolution of a model of Child and Youth Work developed within the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board and provides an overview of the philosophy and practice of CYWs employed. It is believed that school-based Child and Youth Work is an expanding area of practice for CYWs and that their experience will be both instructive and valuable to others.

The discipline of Child Care Work came into being in the Province of Ontario in late 1957 with the opening of the Thistletown Regional Centre, a residential treatment centre for emotionally disturbed children on the border of Metropolitan Toronto. The opening of Thistletown also marked the inception of a two year student training program for staff hired to care for the resident children on a day-day basis. At the end of the two year training period, successful student Child Care Workers* were graduated as Certified Child Care Workers by the Department of Health for the Province of Ontario.

Children who resided in Thistletown attended school on the premises. The local school board supervised the teachers for the school program which operated in small classrooms within the facility. The Child Care Workers were on hand to remove youngsters who were having a hard time coping in the classroom and to provide them with the support necessary to enable them to return to the classroom setting. It was readily apparent that the children's ability to address academic tasks was negatively impacted by a myriad of social, emotional, and developmental factors and that these often interfered with the ability of the children to focus their attention on achieving academic success.

In the years following 1957, Child and Youth Workers who graduated from the Thistletown training program were employed in a variety of mental health settings serving children. C.C.W.s were considered to have expertise in understanding, responding to, and modifying challenging behaviour by virtue of their theoretical and practical on-the-job training.

* (Within this text, the terms “Child Care Worker” and “Child and Youth Worker” are used synonymously. Community Colleges offering Child Care Worker programs within the Province of Ontario made a program name change in June of 1987. Their programs were re-named Child and Youth Worker programs at that time.)

In 1969, sixteen independent Catholic school boards on the western border of Metropolitan Toronto amalgamated to form the Dufferin-Peel Roman Catholic Separate School Board. In its first year as an amalgamated system, the Board decided to establish contained behavioral classes to respond to the needs of those students of average intellectual ability whose behaviour was sufficiently disturbed and disturbing that they were unable to function effectively in a regular class. These classes had a maximum enrollment of 8 students. The staffing model chosen for these behavioral classes included a teacher and a child care worker; the teacher to address the academic needs of the students, the child care worker to address social-emotional needs. Thirty years later, this team staffing model for contained behavioral classes remains intact within Dufferin-Peel and a number of additional distinct roles have evolved for Child and Youth Workers within the school board.

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board did not remain the sole Ontario school board employing Child and Youth Workers. Over the last two decades, growing numbers of school boards within Ontario have begun to recognize the relevance and value to their systems of the knowledge, skills and experience brought by individuals trained in Child and Youth Work.

The following pages will outline the evolution of a range of Child and Youth Work roles within Dufferin-Peel and will describe the model of school-based Child and Youth Work which has developed within this board over the last three decades. Some of the salient concerns related to school-based Child and Youth Work practice will be identified and discussed. Some contextual information regarding the status of Child and Youth Work in other Ontario school boards will be presented along with an outline of some of the key tasks confronting Child and Youth Work as its presence grows in Ontario schools.

Evolution of School-based Child and Youth Work Roles

The original Child and Youth Work role in Dufferin-Peel has been referenced above. A Child and Youth Worker as one half of a teacher-child and youth worker team in a contained behavioral class has constituted a staffing model for thirty years. The selection of this model in 1970 was due largely to the influence of the Superintendent of Special Services at that time. This person recognized and believed in the concept of multi-disciplinary team as an important source of support for students and encouraged collaboration between teachers, psychologists, social workers, speech and language pathologists, and child care workers.

Without the vision and influence of this individual, Child and Youth Work may not have been introduced to Dufferin-Peel.

Within those schools which housed contained behavioral classes, it did not take long for teachers of regular classes to appreciate and to seek out the perspective on behaviour brought to the school by Child Care Workers. Behavioral class Child Care Workers were asked to provide consultation to regular class teachers around behaviour management issues. In consequence of the credibility built by behavioral class Child Care Workers and the demonstrated value of their involvement with behaviorally exceptional students, the school board chose to institute two additional child care roles within the system. One of these was a Guidance Department-based counseling role at the secondary school level and the other was an itinerant, board-wide Child and Youth Work consulting role which enabled schools without access to a contained behavioral class Child Care Worker to tap into the behaviour management expertise of a Child Care Worker. During the first decade of Child Care involvement in Dufferin-Peel, an elementary school-based behavioral resource role developed in several large schools which housed high need special education classes or which served communities whose demographics included a high incidence of behaviorally challenging students. Child Care Workers in these roles provided a variety of services including crisis intervention, individual counseling, small group work, and class-wide programming.

Early in the 1980's, the Ontario Government enacted Bill 82 which created the entitlement of children with a variety of exceptionalities to receive an education in their local community schools. In situations in which local school boards did not have programs appropriate to the needs of the exceptional student, the obligation was created for the local board to assist parents in locating an appropriate program and fund access to that program for the exceptional student. One of the outcomes of this new legislation within Dufferin-Peel was the influx into the system of a relatively large number of students with intellectual and developmental exceptionalities. The school board responded by dramatically increasing the number of Child Care Workers and academic teacher assistants in its employ. Two Child Care roles evolved, one being a one-on-one behavioral support role with an exceptional student and the other that of a Child Care support role in a secondary school "Planning for Independence" contained classroom serving students with intellectual exceptionalities. The first role involved working with individual high need students to manage and shape behaviour and to teach appropriate social and life skills and the second involved similar functions working with developmentally delayed students registered within a special education class.

By 1990, the number of students entering the Dufferin-Peel school system with a diagnosis of Pervasive Developmental Disorder or Autism was climbing steadily. The Board turned to its teacher-child care worker team staffing model in its creation of an itinerant team to provide board-wide consultation assistance in assessment, academic programming, and

behaviour management to classroom teachers of students with these exceptionalities. Toward the end of the decade, the number of students within the Board with these exceptionalities had grown to 150 and a second board-wide consultation support team was created to help address their needs. In 1998, the Board established a contained classroom program for children diagnosed with autism and again utilized the teacher-child and youth worker team staffing model.

In 1992, over two decades after Dufferin-Peel hired its first Child Care Worker, a Senior Child and Youth Worker position was created. At that time, the number of Child and Youth Workers employed by the Board had grown to 82. Since the 70s, CYWs within the Board's employ had been proposing the creation of a Senior CYW role to address the needs of the group for professional development, resource acquisition, and practice supervision. Whereas administrative supervision was in place for CYWs under the authority of supervisory officers and principals of schools, there was no formal mechanism to address professional practice needs and issues for Child and Youth Workers. The Senior Child and Youth Worker position established both a voice and a presence for Child and Youth Work within the administrative structure of the organization. It enabled the disparate members of the Child and Youth Worker group to be linked through the planning, coordinating, and advisory activities undertaken by the Senior Child and Youth Worker with the other members of the group and ensured that a Child and Youth Work perspective began to be reflected in the policy and planning documents, reports, and communication vehicles of the Board.

Within Dufferin-Peel, Child and Youth Workers are allocated to the Superintendents of the six Families of Schools and to the Superintendent of Program. Authority to assign individual Child and Youth Workers to specific roles resides with these seven senior administrative officers rather than with the Senior Child and Youth Worker.

What Is It That Child and Youth Workers Actually Do In Schools?

The Child and Youth Work roles outlined above indicate some of the student populations which are the focus of the work of CYWs assigned to specific roles. Students within contained behavioral classes are one population served as are students in contained high school "Planning for Independence" programs and students identified with autism. Child and Youth Workers are involved with students around issues related to behaviour. Behaviour is recognized as the reflection and expression of the internal and external life of the student. The core function of Child and Youth Workers in schools is to participate in the assessment and interpretation of the meaning and significance of behavior and to address underlying issues. In addition, it is to undertake the challenge of management and modification of behaviour, at the micro level, with individual students, using relationship as a tool and, at the macro level, with classes or school populations as a whole through group and program development work.

Child and Youth Workers in Dufferin-Peel are guided by a mission statement, formulated in 1997 by the CYW group as a whole, which complements the mission statement of the school board. The CYW Mission Statement is as follows:

“Child and Youth Workers of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board respond to the behaviour and social-emotional needs of students through direct intervention and consultation. Child and Youth Workers support, advocate, and facilitate on behalf of students. Child and Youth Workers contribute to the development and implementation of preventative programs to foster healthy school environments, in collaboration with other professionals, family, and community.”

Direct Intervention and Consultation

As highlighted by the mission statement, Child and Youth Workers are engaged directly with children either on an individual or group basis. This engagement may be focused on the acquisition of social or life skills, on behaviour modification or change, on peer relationships, or on issues related to life crises such as separation or divorce, mental illness, family violence, or sickness and death. This involvement may take the form of individual or group counseling or may involve activity-based programming. Child and Youth Work engagement around a student may occur indirectly through consultation with teachers, parents, or members of other support services disciplines such as social work, psychology, or speech and language. In these instances, the CYW's client may only indirectly be the student in question. The teacher, parent, or the school as a whole might be the immediate beneficiary of the Child and Youth Worker's input.

Prevention

The CYW Mission Statement alludes to the preventative work done by Child and Youth Workers to foster healthy school environments. The degree to which individual Child and Youth Workers can contribute to this work is governed to a large degree by the role to which they are assigned, but as a collective, the Child and Youth Workers in Dufferin-Peel are committed to the principle of building safe school communities through the promotion and delivery of school-wide pro-social programs and through involvement in the recreational and social extra-curricular life of the schools in which they work. Examples of class-wide and school-wide preventative programs utilized within Dufferin-Peel schools are Second Step Violence Prevention, Lions-Quest Conflict Resolution, Community Board Peer Mediation, Living Colours (a Canadian Mental Health Association program designed to build self-esteem and develop communication skills), Bully-Proofing Your School, and the Classwide Social Skills Program. Child and Youth

Workers collaborate with teachers and other support services staff in delivering programs of this nature in schools which are determined to be pro-active in building safe, comfortable learning environments for everyone in their school communities.

Striking a balance between direct service work and prevention activities is a dynamic process for the Child and Youth Workers of Dufferin-Peel. The balance is affected by the year-to-year role assignment of CYWs, by changes of personnel and priority within individual school settings, by competing demands upon the energy and resources of the school board as a whole. CYWs must be content to contribute to the prevention-oriented dimension of the Child and Youth Worker collective task to the extent that they are able to do so within the constraints of their individual work situations. Nevertheless, prevention-oriented activity remains a priority for the Child and Youth Work staff as a whole.

Spectrum of Services

A large number of variables impact on the ability of individual CYWs to frame their work from year to year. However, CYWs working within the school system can adopt a long-term horizon and recognize that, over time, the variables which affect their work in the short term will change and they will be confronted with new opportunities and challenges. The expectation for CYWs, imposed by their mission statement and by the myriad of student needs within the school board, is to deliver a spectrum of services to students and schools. This spectrum will reflect activity on a continuum stretching from programming for prevention to direct or tertiary intervention with high need individual students. It will reflect a broad range of response options including individual counseling, small group work, whole class work, and whole school work. It will reflect a range of options for service delivery ranging from direct intervention to indirect work through consultation.

Professional Development

The reality that Child and Youth Workers will be called upon to deliver a spectrum of services within the school system defines the long-term professional development challenge for both the individual Child and Youth Worker and for the CYW group as a whole. Child and Youth Workers individually and as a group are compelled to constantly develop and refine their knowledge and skills throughout their careers within the school board in order to be able to contribute effectively to the delivery of a spectrum of programs and services. They must avail themselves of opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills whenever possible and must accept the responsibility and imperative of fostering their own professional growth through study, research, and professional collaboration.

Commitment to a Team Model

Child and Youth Work within Dufferin-Peel has evolved in an environment strongly committed to a team approach to meeting the needs of students. The system has grown from its original 16 schools in 1969 to its present 120 schools housing 83,000 students. Each school has some access to a support services team comprised of an administrator, special education teacher, speech and language pathologist, child and youth worker, social worker, and psychologist which works in partnership with classroom teachers, educational assistants, parents, parish, and community agencies to address the academic, social, emotional, and developmental needs of students. Exponential growth of the school system over the last three decades and a much slower rate of growth in numbers of support staff has posed a great challenge to the maintenance of a team approach to serving students, but commitment to the model stubbornly persists.

Professional Supervision and Evaluation

Historically, the Child and Youth Work staff within Dufferin-Peel have differentiated between administrative and practice supervision in any discussion of professional supervision.

Within elementary and secondary school settings in the Province of Ontario, authority and responsibility reside with the principal of the school. Those working within a school setting, including Child and Youth Workers, are accountable to the principal. The principal has the primary role in staff allocation within the school. Consequently, the role of the CYW within any given school may be governed to a significant extent by the expectations and priorities of the school principal.

Principals are responsible for all facets of the organization of their schools and for the professional supervision of their teaching staff members. Like any staff member, Child and Youth Workers are expected to meet the norms of staff behaviour and conform to the administrative expectations of the principal of the school in which they are working. Concerns related to administrative issues are appropriately addressed with the principal. Issues related to the domain of professional practice, however: i.e. "what to do and how to do it", are often beyond the scope and experience of the school principal. Child and Youth Workers and other support services staff need to look elsewhere for their practice supervision.

There is no formal process of practice supervision for Child and Youth Workers within Dufferin-Peel. Case consultation and exploration of ethical issues has occurred within the context of the multi-disciplinary team process fostered within schools. CYWs have been able to access one another to confer around practice issues on an ad hoc basis. From 1990 onwards, there has been a Child and Youth Work Council composed of representative CYWs from the various geographical regions of the Board and this body provided a forum for general discussion of Child and Youth

Worker practice issues. The Council was chaired by the Superintendent of Special and Alternative Programs and had a representative social worker and psychologist as a part of its membership. After 1992, this body was chaired by the newly appointed Senior Child and Youth Worker and became a purely Child and Youth Work body. The Senior Child and Youth Worker became a primary source for informal case consultation and practice advice although CYWs also continued to rely on trusted colleagues for counsel around practice issues.

Evaluation has been a contentious issue for all support services groups within Dufferin-Peel (social work, psychology, speech and language, and child and youth work). For a number of years, the subject has been a matter for debate between the Board and the Association representing the interests of the support services in contractual negotiations. Debate has generally focused on who would conduct evaluations, what evaluative tools would be utilized, and what would be the potential outcomes of evaluation.

Recognizing the professional benefits to both client and service provider of looking at the strengths and weaknesses of professional practice, the Child and Youth Work group developed a Professional Practice Review Process. Although not strictly an evaluative review, the process utilizes a series of personal interviews conducted by the Senior Child and Youth Worker with teachers and administrative personnel selected by the CYW under review to elicit feedback on that CYW's professional practice. This feedback is made available solely to the CYW under review by the Senior Child and Youth Worker. The process operates informally and must be initiated by individual CYWs who wish to access feedback on their work.

Boosters, Allies, Models, and Mentors

School-based Child and Youth Work's growth and evolution within the Dufferin-Peel school board has been governed by many factors. Perhaps the most critical factor has been the integrity of the work of the Child and Youth Workers on a day-day basis. This has earned them credibility, respect, and high regard in the eyes of students, parents, and colleagues. This in turn has generated support and endorsement for the work undertaken by Child and Youth Workers within schools. It has created boosters for school-based Child and Youth Work and allies in the effort to address the needs of students. It provides a model not only for new people entering this area of Child and Youth Work, but also an example for the young people with whom we work. Over the years, Child and Youth Workers in Dufferin-Peel have enjoyed the mentorship of experienced co-workers both within and outside of their own discipline. This has fostered their professional growth. With increasing frequency, Child and Youth Workers are now passing this benefit on to co-op students from our own secondary schools and to the students enrolled in Child and Youth Work training programs within the region.

School-based Child and Youth Work Across Ontario

A growing number of school boards across the Province of Ontario are hiring child and youth workers to address the needs of behaviorally challenging students. This has been a trend for the last two decades. Many boards hire child and youth workers utilizing the "Child and Youth Worker" job designation or a similar designation such as "Child and Youth Counselor" or "Youth Counselor" while others hire people trained and certified as child and youth workers into jobs which are designated "Teacher Assistant" roles. Some boards which offer "Child and Youth Worker" positions hire only certified child and youth workers while others are prepared to accept training or experience which is judged to be equivalent: e.g. an early childhood education diploma, a bachelor's degree in psychology or social work, a social service diploma, or relevant experience in the human services. The degree to which child and youth workers are linked to one another within the structures of their organizations varies greatly. Some work in total isolation from their professional colleagues while others are linked through regular meetings, electronic communication, or staff development activity. In many situations, supervision is limited to administrative oversight on the part of a school principal while in others, child and youth work staff relate to a supervisor whose professional discipline is Psychology, Social Work, or Teaching. Very few school boards employing child and youth workers have created senior child and youth work positions which bear supervisory or administrative responsibility for child and youth work staff.

The news related to the emergence of school-based Child and Youth Work within Ontario schools is mixed. It is good news that the knowledge and practical skills of child and youth workers is being recognized by a growing number of school boards and that this expertise is being brought to bear in one of the key areas of young people's lives—their schools. The bad news is that a great deal of trial and error is occurring in the introduction and application of this expertise and, in some instances, there is a degree of exploitation of child and youth workers in that their training and service is valued but not recognized and rewarded in tangible ways. Both educational organizations and child and youth workers themselves have a great deal to learn in order to ensure the maximum benefit to all of the introduction of CYWs to schools. There are clear tasks for the future.

Future Tasks

1. If the full potential of Child and Youth Work is to be realized in school systems, it is essential that models for providing school-based Child and Youth Work Services be clearly conceptualized, developed, and articulated so that school systems have some bases for constructing their own models.

2. Leadership is a significant factor in the process of development of models of school-based Child and Youth Work practice. It is exceptional within Ontario school boards employing Child and Youth Workers to find an administrative structure which fosters the building of an effective model of Child and Youth Work Service. Consequently, there is an imperative for child and youth workers to share the tasks of leadership in conceptualizing, articulating, and promoting effective models of service.
3. Networks of school-based child and youth workers need to be developed so that models of service and resources can be shared and mutual support given. There is a role here for provincial and state child and youth work associations.
4. Child and Youth Workers practicing within school systems need to turn their attention to the task of integrating their work into the fabric of their educational systems. This means that they must become intimately familiar with those systems and resist the temptation to confine their interest and knowledge to the narrow confines of their own practice discipline. Child and Youth Work must not simply be a thread attached to the cloth of the educational system. It must become woven into the fabric of the system by providing contributions which are integral to the realization of the mission and goals of the system as a whole.
5. Child and Youth Workers within educational systems need to have their work valued and recognized appropriately. This will only come about if CYWs are able to demonstrate ability and integrity in their work and then are prepared to "crow" about it. It will necessitate CYWs taking the initiative to ensure that their work is visible (e.g. through statistical reporting, through contributions to newsletters and other communication devices, through in-service presentations within their schools, through voluntary participation in the various committee structures within their systems). Like parents and teachers, CYWs must remind themselves of the power of expectation and ensure that they articulate their expectation of recognition clearly within their systems. Strong affiliation with professional associations can contribute to this cause as can active union involvement.

CONCLUSION

Child and Youth Work has been going to school in Ontario for the last three decades. Presently, Child and Youth Workers are employed in some capacity in more than half of Ontario's school boards reflecting a growing

trend toward the integration of Child and Youth Work knowledge and skills with those of teachers and other educational support disciplines. A similar trend is apparent in a number of other provinces including British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, and Nova Scotia. This trend will undoubtedly continue to grow as school systems struggle to address not only the academic needs but the diverse and complex social, emotional and developmental needs of young people in schools.

School-based Child and Youth Work represents a distinct stream of practice for Child and Youth Workers. It is likely to become increasingly mainstream as evidenced by its accelerating growth in Ontario and other provinces. The long term experience of Dufferin-Peel Child and Youth Workers has shown that the practice of school-based Child and Youth Work moves forward most effectively when it is rooted in a model of service which incorporates a number of essential components. We have found these to be:

1. A vision of service and a clearly articulated mission statement
2. Clear hiring criteria and role descriptions for CYW staff
3. A variety of CYW roles linked through team processes to other support services
4. Long-term planning which includes a focus on prevention services
5. A broad range of short-term intervention strategies and programs
6. Access to a spectrum of services
7. Access to resource materials
8. Access to professional support, staff development and evaluation
9. Inclusion in organizational structures of the school system

It is the hope of Dufferin-Peel Child and Youth Workers that what they have learned over their thirty year history in developing one model of School-based Child and Youth Work may provide some insights and sign posts for others engaged in similar endeavors. We applaud and encourage all of our CYW colleagues in other localities who are advancing this work in their own unique ways.