

OVERVIEW

It all comes down to how we care about each other! Interpersonal exchanges are organized by the perspectives and experiences we bring to relationships. From developmental science comes trauma-informed care. The articles in this volume report that trauma-informed care fundamentally changes the way we interact with children and youth by recognizing not only who they are, but what they have been through. Complex and challenging behaviors, generated in response to our attempts to help, are the product of past abuse. Understanding this developmental dynamic provides a deep sense for “why and how” to support healthy change.

In addition, through trauma-informed care, we break new ground in recognizing that telling the story of the abuse may be less a one-time response to crisis but more a life-long opportunity to tell the story over time in ways that evolve as healthy gains. Could it really be as simple and complex that with the right love and care, children and youth build an emotional and psychological reservoir of positive experiences that will always be tested based on the past, but ultimately can come to be trusted as the new story? This is the main theme which the articles in this volume communicate through program and practice.

In transformation, children and youth are more anxious than not to regain safe control over their lives. They can seek a false sense of control in negative acting out if left in situations which continually lack appropriate supports. On the other hand, through active and effective youth-adult partnerships, youth can counter the effects of trauma by gaining repeated “normalized experiences” by taking healthy risks. Trauma-informed care provides the tools and techniques for youth to translate repeated positive experience into the skills necessary to manage everyday life experiences and ultimately to become architects of their own lives.

None of us really like the term “normalized,” but normal is a concept that the public and the policy makers can understand. With trauma-informed care has come the clarion call for all youth, especially youth who have been sorely abused in life and by the welfare system, to have the normal experiences needed to grow up in a healthy way. In best practice, we are therefore rapidly moving away from systems that re-traumatize children and youth to initiatives that keep kids as connected as they can be to families and community.

Gone is the notion that they should be removed from society for their own protection or even to be consequented. And instead we have replaced the old thinking with a trauma-informed care approach that demands that every young person have the opportunity and access to strength-based, everyday life, growing up activities. A foster youth should be able to have an overnight and go to the prom. A youth in a group home should be able to go to after-school the same way the other youth in class do. Youth in detention centers deserve the chance to rehabilitate through career preparation. These age-appropriate everyday life activities are the sustenance for the possibility of lifelong success at school, home, and work.

How could these things somehow have been lost or fallen out of focus for our young people; they make so much intuitive and moral sense? Famously, Professor Vander Ven is known for saying “we become what we do!” The trauma-informed care commitment is to reduce risk and increase protection by providing normalizing experiences that result in the redefinition of permanence as a large network of relationships to support our youth in times of concrete needs. In this network of relationships, youth master skills and competencies through the positive experience of healthy interdependence.

The new neuroscience powerfully validates this approach. It turns out that while zero to three or five is a critical period for healthy development, so too is adolescence through early adulthood. The brain is still forming into the 20s and the executive decision-making function of the brain forms last. Now we know that youth who get the right nutrition, love, support, and developmental activities—even late in life—are likely to form the necessary pathways in the brain that structure healthy and positive behavior!

This edition of the *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work* sounds these themes and provides a rich portrait for the evolving strengths of trauma-informed care across practice settings of our field; from program informed by policy to the most recent advances in direct care tools and techniques. Experts from across a full range of professional disciplines served as a review panel for the proposed articles:

Joseph Benamati, *Ph.D., Senior Faculty*, Sanctuary Institute, Yonkers, New York

Charlyn Harper Browne, *Ph.D., Senior Associate and Director of Quality Improvement Center on Early Childhood*,
Center for the Study of Social Policy, Washington, DC

Rachel Burke, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

Patrick Foran, *BA, Director and Coordinator*, Hull Services,
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Adrian Hawkins, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

James Henry, *Ph.D., Associate Professor*, Western Michigan University,
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Frank Kros, *MSW, JD, President*, The Upside Down Organization and
Executive Vice President of The Children’s Guild, Baltimore, Maryland

We were particularly pleased and learned a great deal from the youth leaders who joined fully in the expert panel from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. Full and authentic youth engagement with youth represents the future.

For the better part of the past fifty years, the *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work* has often debuted new models for practice. The most powerful evidence is drawn from our work, up front and close with the children and youth, in the professional practice of direct care. Such contributions, for example, reach back to Jack McElroy's notions of the power of attachment in a "children's garden of relationships" and Mark Krueger's practices of "grounded rhythm and presence." In the same way attachment and relationship have stood the best test of time, we believe that trauma-informed care will change the trajectory for the depth and sustainability of child and youth care work.

Among the contributions presented, from the team at the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), comes an article on Youth Thrive. Youth Thrive is a dynamic national initiative to reduce risk and increase protection by delivering trauma-informed care. The editors would like to note that some of this material has appeared previously on www.cssp.org, which provides a download for a comprehensive review of the literatures which support trauma-informed care: *Advancing Healthy Development and Well-Being* by Dr. Charlyn Harper-Browne.

Also, on the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative website, www.jimcaseyyouth.org, is the *Adolescent Brain: New Research and Its Implications for Young People Transitioning From Foster Care*. This download comes complete with evidence-based research, executive summary, and PowerPoints for transferring the knowledge.

In addition to the trauma-informed care theme, this edition also has a "special invited section" designed by Professor Karen Vander Ven, past editor of this journal, on the work of Erik Erikson. Erikson, who taught in the program at the University of Pittsburgh that prepared child and youth care workers, was among the first to fully understand the historical moment for young people that is produced when the trauma of conflicts can be resolved. We mature through the life cycle. It could be said that the work of childhood is play and the work of adolescence is intimacy. The articles in this invited section explore the work of child and youth development with a lens toward how important it is in trauma-informed care to understand the way in which we resolve conflicts through relationships, opening the door to the mastery of developmental competencies.

The editors would also like to note that this section has the last published work of Peter Benson, completed just before he passed away. Dr. Benson led Search Institute, which ultimately delivered developmental assets in more than 650 communities across the country and around the world. He was the seminal author of *All Our Kids* and believed deeply in developmentally-attentive community. The worst trauma in the life of any young person was the lack of an adult who cared and the greatest strength was the asset of youth in partnership with many, many adults. The signature theme for the goal of the developmental asset movement launched

by Peter was “healthy youth and healthy community.” Adieu, Peter, we won’t forget your work. Let us all live up to Peter’s greatest hope!

Finally, this issue includes two additional peer-reviewed articles: one focusing on the role for youth workers in providing mental health care, and the second exploring the impact of rural youth services on education, housing, and employment outcomes.

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