

INTERVIEWS WITH LEADERS

It is often thought that it is impossible to have a career in child and youth care. Yet many professionals have managed to do it. Some stay in direct service. Some move into education or administration. Others develop their own programs. And no matter what choice they make, most seem happy that they have stayed.

In the past two issues of *Child and Youth Care Work*, Valerie Ranft, Lorraine Fox, Erin Pirozak, Penny Parry (1989) and Karen Vander Ven (1990), all leaders in the field, gave us rich examples and insight about their careers as women in child and youth care work.

For this issue we asked four well known men, Jerome Beker, Larry Brendtro, Nicholas Long and Henry Maier, all of whom chose to move from direct service into child and youth care education, to respond to questions about why they chose and remained in child and youth care. Following are their responses:

Jerome Beker, Professor
University of Minnesota

1. Please give us a brief sketch of your experience in the field.

I went to summer camp as a child and moved into a staff role when I reached the appropriate age, working also in a variety of community-based youth programs in what was, to me, the "off season." Later, while in graduate school, I became involved with children's institutions for the first time. Probably largely because of my speech impediment, my connections with such settings focused largely on research.

After completing school, I was offered a research position at Berkshire Farm for Boys, a residential center for delinquent boys in upstate New York, provided that I could obtain a grant to support me! I managed that and later was put on the regular payroll. In 1963, I moved to the Syracuse University Youth Development Center, where I directed a study of racial integration in the public schools and was able to initiate a group care study on the side. That work led to the book *Critical Incidents in Child Care*.

The next stop, in 1968, was a position as Director of Research in Residential Programs at the Jewish Board of Guardians in New York, operator of the famous Hawthorne Cedar Knolls School, best known as the site of Howard Polsky's Cottage Six. It was while I was at JBG that *Child and Youth Care Forum* (originally *Child Care Quarterly*, later *Child and Youth Care Quarterly*) was born. In 1972, I moved to Herschel Alt's Institute for Child Mental Health as Director of Research in Residential Care.

It was then back to academia, first as director of a child care training program at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, then here to the University of Minnesota as professor and director of the Center for Youth Development and Research in 1978. I left the directorship after ten years to focus on my work in group care and, in 1988-89, spent nine months in Israel studying group care under a Fulbright Scholarship. I also serve on the steering committees of the American affiliates of the International Association of Workers for Troubled Children and Youth (AIEJI) and the International Federation of Educative Communities (FICE), and on the board of the Minnesota Association of Child and Youth Care Workers.

2. Why did you come into child and youth care?

Growing up, I always liked camp best, and all the more so when I was able to join the staff. My father directed the camp I usually went to, and I learned from him and from my experience that it was a powerful developmental tool—for better or worse—for working with young people. But the day came (Alas!) when I had to go out into the real world, and I discovered group care as an environment that, superficially at least, looked somewhat like camp. Life would be a dream!

Too quickly, I learned that such was not the case, either for the young people in care or for the staff. Camp was a temporary environment, and most of those who were there strove to get as much out of it as they could. Most of the children were motivated and happy; they gave verve and joy in support of the efforts of the staff. How different was life in group care, where days and weeks stretched endlessly into months and years, as settings devoted mostly to custody housed, mostly bored and lethargic youth (whatever their diagnostic category) who were there because they had to be there rather than because they wanted to.

Yet the structure of the group care environment still looked like camp and still seemed potentially to have the same power for enhancing the development of those involved, if only we could harness it. That promise brought me more and more deeply into the residential care field and, subsequently, into the child and youth care work movement.

After my graduation from Swarthmore College with a major in psychology in 1955, unable to find a graduate program in group care *per se*, I looked long and hard for a program with the flexibility to allow me to focus in this area. I found one at Columbia University that enabled me to do just that, including courses in social work, education, and allied areas, largely under the tutelage of the late Ray Patouillet and with the cooperation of Daun Keith and numerous others who helped along the way.

The positions noted above followed, enabling me to develop my con-

nections to the field as the field itself was emerging. It has (almost) always been fun, combined with a sense that our work provides the opportunity to do something worthwhile in the service of young people and of our skilled and dedicated, if often underappreciated colleagues.

3. Why did you stay?

How could one not? Seriously, with all the frustrations and turmoil that mark (and mar) our field, I have found it to be as exciting and rewarding as I can imagine. By and large, the people involved are great and great to be with, friendly, informal, a worldwide community whose members are almost instantly recognizable to one another, and a source of continuing mutual hospitality and support. Although we do not take ourselves too seriously, most of us are serious idealists, committed to the importance of what we do and of doing it well.

Even as we have moved toward professionalization, we have consciously strived to avoid the trap of becoming overly self-serving at the expense of our clients and our obligations to society. Perhaps we do not always succeed in this, but we continue to hold it as an ideal and we achieve it more fully, it seems to me, than do most of the allied professions with which we work. If we were to lose that, we would lose our heart and our soul; as long as we have it, what better place could there be? The work is hard, the frustrations are great, and the road is long, but the task is surely among the most important there is and we get to do it with friends. How could we not stay the course?

4. What advice or encouragement can you give new workers?

Despite all that I have said above, you probably know that most people who enter the field leave it after a relatively short period of time. Many find it a useful point of entry into a related human service career; that's fine, and I would hope that they remember their experience in child and youth care work, applying its lessons more broadly and not succumbing to the pressures in many allied fields to focus on client weaknesses above their strengths, on their deficits instead of their development.

But the greatest rewards, I am convinced, await those of us who catch the spark and find that we are so enthralled with this field and its work and so excited about our clients and our colleagues that we will not permit ourselves to be extruded. These are the people who, working at all levels and in a wide variety of contexts, will build the profession in the service of children and youth, and we encourage all who share our vision to join with us in the task.

After more than 35 years in this field, I still get up in the morning excited about the day ahead and can't wait to get to work! What more could you ask from a career?

BUNNY RABBITS DANCING WITH WOLVES

Larry Brendtro, Professor
Augustana College

1. Please give us a brief sketch of your experience in the field.

I grew up in South Dakota, land of *Dances With Wolves*. As a student in the late 1950s I was initiated into this work in an inner-city youth program in Newark, New Jersey. I then worked for five years in a residential school for handicapped children, serving first as a child care worker and later as social worker/teacher. After receiving a master's degree in school administration, I was principal of this school for a year.

In 1963 I entered the University of Michigan to pursue a PhD. specializing in troubled children and youth. For four summers I was on the staff of the U. of Michigan Fresh Air Camp, operated by the psychology department for training graduate students in work with delinquent and disturbed children. This is where I met such persons as Fritz Redl, David Wineman, Al Trieschman and James Whittaker. While pursuing my doctorate, I also was a child care worker at Hawthorn Center, a mental health facility for children, and I also completed a psychology internship there. After completing my PhD. I joined the faculty of the University of Illinois where I started the graduate special education program in emotional disturbance. I also trained child care staff for a new residential treatment facility operated by the university and the Department of Mental Health. While here, Al Trieschman, Jim Whittaker and I began work on *The Other 23 Hours*.

From 1967-1981 I was president of the Starr Commonwealth Schools in Michigan and Ohio. We transformed a large traditional institution into a continuum of services for children and families. Here we wrote the books *Positive Peer Culture* and *Reeducating Troubled Youth*. In cooperation with the Ohio State University, we started a master's educator program in 1978. I was also active with the National Association of Homes for Children and started their journal which is currently entitled *Caring*. This year provided many opportunities to travel, speak and consult with child care programs throughout North America.

Since 1981 I have been a professor at my alma mater, Augustana College in South Dakota where I teach courses for special educators and educators. Here in the land of *Dances With Wolves*, I have again been able to work closely with programs serving Native American youth, and

in 1988 my colleague, Dr. Martin Brokenleg and I shared our research on Native American philosophies of child care with the Trieschman Center. This work became the core of our latest book, *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future*, published by National Educational Service, Bloomington, Indiana.

I lectured in Norway and Sweden last year, and will spend 1991-1992 on leave from Augustana working on two new books. Arlin Ness of Starr Commonwealth and I will be writing a book on youth empowerment philosophy, and Jerome Beker and I are continuing research on a book on the ideas of great youth work pioneers of the twentieth century.

Some of my best ideas about children come from my own family. My wife, Janna and I live on a farm in South Dakota with two high-school-age sons and a daughter in middle-school.

2. Why did you come into child and youth care?

A visiting pastor from New Jersey sparked my interest in joining him in his church's inner city youth program. I spent two summers in wonderful "cultural shock" as I left the prairies of Dakota for the streets of New Jersey. From that point, I sought every opportunity possible to work with challenging children and youth.

3. Why did you stay?

The relationships with young people have been the major payoff. I have learned so much from them, and hope that sometimes it has been reciprocal. After many years in the field, one has the satisfaction of seeing former students come back; some who seemed to have very little chance of success have often surprised me very pleasantly. As one becomes a senior member of this young field, great satisfaction comes from mentoring younger professionals. There is so much yet to do, so many problems we have not yet begun to solve. Kurt Hahn of Outward Bound once said that every young person needs a "grande passion," a powerful cause to which he or she can become committed. At age 18 this became my grande passion; I am no longer young, but it is still "grande".

4. What encouragement can you give new workers?

Am I allowed to give advice instead? If so:

Work somewhere where your philosophy can flourish. If you go to work each day and compromise your principles, you are being changed

but the system is not. If you decide to change the system for the better, more power to you. I mean, without power, you will probably not succeed. But we are not a particularly powerful profession yet. As Alan Keith Lucas says, we cry "all power to the bunny rabbits" but don't know how to get the wolves to go along. I leave you with a quick, quick blueprint for building your power:

- a. Learn to dance with wolves. You don't have to become like them, but you better know their moves. This is defensive power.
- b. Become more competent at what you do; this is expert power.
- c. Build networks with others who share your vision, e.g., make your child care association more powerful. This is collective power.
- d. Choose your battles carefully. It may be better to come back in five years to direct the place rather than ram against a brick wall every day. This is strategic power.
- e. Read books and get your rest. This will keep you from slipping into a rut or the grave. Call this power "life."
- f. Rely on a power greater than yourself. Read psychiatrist Robert Coles' latest book, *The Spiritual Life of Children* to see the significance of this kind of power.
- g. Keep touch with the voices, pains, and joys of young people. They are the best source of renewal you will find.

ALL POWER TO THE BUNNY RABBITS!

Nicholas Long

*Professor Emeritus
American University*

1. Please give us a brief sketch of your experience in the field.

I was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1929 before there were jet planes, television sets, computer chips and Häagen Daz Yogurt. During my career, I have served in many different professional roles in a variety of educational and mental health facilities.

For example, my experiences included functioning as the principal of the Children's Psychiatric Hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan (1955-56); as Associate Professor in Education and Psychology at Indiana University (1958-62); as Executive Director of The Hillcrest Children's Psychiatric Center in Washington, DC (1962-70); founder and Director of The Rose School, a public mental health treatment program in Washington, DC for severely disturbed students (1970-90); and Professor of Special Education at American University (1968-90). Currently, I'm Director of the Institute of Psychoeducational Training and Co-Editor of a new journal with Dr. Larry Brendtro called *The Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Problems*.

While I have been involved in psychoeducational research and training activities, I believe my ongoing contact with troubled students over 35 years has provided me with a daily reminder of how difficult it is to help these students and how important it is to keep learning additional intervention skills.

My career in this field was a lifelong plan which I actualized in logical sequential steps! The truth is, I never planned to be a special educator or to teach emotionally disturbed students.

I began college as a math major, but like many college students, I was caught in cross-currents of the Korean War and was not sure what I wanted to do professionally. During the summer of my sophomore year, I worked as a camp counselor at the Merrill Palmer Institute in Detroit. This camp was a field placement for graduate students from Cornell University who were studying child development. After this experience, I changed my major, entered Merrill Palmer and received my B.A. in Early Childhood Education in 1952. I applied to teach first grade in the Detroit Public School system but was refused because men do not teach young children! This was my first experience in reverse gender discrimination. My reaction was to apply to graduate school in Child Development at the University of Michigan.

Like most graduate students who were strong on dreams and short on money, we had to work to survive. In my case, the only available half-time teaching position was at the University of Michigan Hospital school teaching children who lived in iron lung machines. This was my first experience with exceptional children and I hoped that my interest and energy would make up for my lack of skills. Teaching these dependent children turned out to be a painful and rewarding experience and added a new dimension to my interest in child development. By the following summer, I completed my M.Ed. and needed a summer job.

After systematically reading every bulletin board on campus, I was attracted to a flyer describing a summer camp counselor position. The School of Education, Fresh Air Camp (F.A.C.), was offering graduate students room, board and six graduate hours if they would work as counselors at this therapeutic camp for emotionally disturbed children. I applied, was accepted and had no warning how this experience would change my life.

F.A.C. was a wondrous place. All the counselors were graduate students from Psychology, Social Work and Education and we all lived and worked together as a team. At F.A.C. we learned about psychopathology from the ground up, which meant we frequently restrained campers who were out of control. This intensive, hands-on experience in learning was just what I needed after a year of academic course work. More important, we had the opportunity to observe Bill Morse and Dave Wineman in crisis situations and we marveled at the variety of techniques and skills they possessed. Also, Fritz Redl was a visiting case consultant to this camp. His insights and wit into understanding aggressive students created additional excitement and admiration from all of us. I never could have predicted that my contact with Fritz Redl at this camp would cement my career in this field four years later.

At the end of that summer, Dr. Morse asked me if I was interested in entering his Ph.D. program in Educational Psychology. He had just received a full-time graduate assistantship which could support my meager needs. I said yes and spent the next three years completing my Ph.D. while returning to F.A.C. every summer.

The next turning point in my career happened in 1955. I was in the final stages of accepting an appointment as an Assistant Professor in Child Development at Ohio State University when Dr. Morse called me into his office and asked if I wanted to be the first principal of the Children's Psychiatric Hospital. Dr. Rabinovitch, a child psychiatrist, and his entire staff decided to leave the University, causing the Department of Psychiatry to have a major crisis. The Department had a brand new building but no staff. I remember saying that I was not trained as a prin-

cial and didn't know anything about remedial education. Bill said, "Don't worry, neither does anyone else." With Bill as my supervisor, I entered the field of troubled children and youth.

In retrospect, I wish I could say that I had more control over my early career. What happened is that I was fortunate to have outstanding mentors and to be at the right place at the right time, when a crisis created a career opportunity for me. Perhaps this is why I believe that "Crises are unique and powerful opportunities for teaching and learning."

2. Why did you come into Child and Youth Care?

This is a difficult question to answer since different positive forces emerged at different stages of my career. The three which come to mind are: the stimulation of ongoing learning; unusual opportunities; and a belief in the value of helping troubled children and youth.

Like known life in the depth of ocean faults, there is still little awareness about what exists in the darkness of the human mind. The challenge of this field is the ongoing exploration into the complexity of the human mind. Initially, you learn about your feelings of vulnerability and helplessness when you reach out to help others, only to experience personal rejection and abuse from them. Next, you learn about your personal historical luggage which you carry into every new relationship. Then you discover the dynamics of the conflict cycle, aggression and counter-aggression, passive aggressiveness and dependency. What's exhilarating to acknowledge is that there is no end to self-learning. In fact, once you understand some complex relationship or achieve some insight into your dynamics, like co-dependency, the result is a new and deeper list of questions and concerns. Personally, I feel this field promotes the quest for self-actualization.

Another attraction for me was the opportunity to develop psychoeducational programs and intervention strategies. I was motivated to set up a year-long graduate training program which integrated ongoing academic training in a quality service program. The result was the American University/Rose School Teacher Training Program. I also had the opportunity to pursue my interests in life space interviewing, video programs on emotionally disturbed children and youth and to publish *Conflict in the Classroom* with Bill Morse and Ruth Newman and *Teaching Self Control* with Stan Fagan. Of course, it helped to have a supportive staff and federal money.

The third attraction is a basic belief in the importance of our work. These children did not choose to become emotionally disturbed and their behavior frequently alienates them from most adults. As a result, they do

not have any advocates in the community, even though they frequently have been victimized by their community. Our task is to help these children, who never had a first chance in life, to experience the security of adult psychological protection and caring; the joy of exploring and discovering the satisfaction of learning; and the comfort of sleeping through the night without the pain of demons, devils and death. This career choice does not provide you with ample money, power or fame; but it does document that your time, energy and skills are on the side of goodness, caring and helping. Perhaps we will never get an M.B.A.; but we will never wake up and say that we spent our life in the pursuit of materialistic and narcissistic goals.

4. What advice or encouragement can you give new workers?

There is the story about how many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb? The answer is: none. The light bulb must want to change. Perhaps this explains why advice is so available and ineffective as a source of brightening up a gloomy world. What I can do is to share the advice I gave myself over the years: Nicholas, hear this!

1. Before caring for others, care for yourself. Examine your motivation for working with this difficult population. Try not to trick yourself. Accept your limitations and appreciate your strengths.
2. Focus on living a rich emotional life so you are not using your students as a source of emotional gratification.
3. Develop outside interests and friends separate from your work place so you are not always involved in pathological discussions of students and staff. This means developing clear work and play boundaries.
4. Keep a diary of your experience. It will allow you a chance to reflect on your professional life over the years.
5. Get as much training and as many degrees as possible. Whenever you have an opportunity, plan to study with someone who is competent. Also, develop one area of expertise for yourself.
6. Finally, avoid staying in any program which is destructive to your students and your mental health. Crisis work doesn't mean you accept a sadomasochistic role in which there is little opportunity to build positive relationships and skills with your students. Remember, there *are* excellent and nurturing programs that are seeking talented and dedicated staff.

Henry W. Maier

Professor Emeritus

University of Washington

1. Please give us a brief sketch of your experience in the field.

It seems to me that my experience in working with children and youth finds its roots in my own excitement and adventures as a boy scout with rich group life, mountain climbing, and camping. These were stretched out with similar activities when I became a camp counselor for several seasons.

During World War II I served as a conscientious objector, first in forest fire fighting camps; later for 2-1/2 years as a counselor to children with learning disabilities and severe emotional difficulties. While my earlier experiences were primarily with "normal" middle-class children, in my assignment to the state institution I suddenly had to cope with a cottage of 24 severely socially deprived and psychologically complex youngsters in an isolated state institution. It was a demanding assignment.

These were days of exhaustion with almost 24 hours on the job and only every other weekend free of duty. Nevertheless, I found myself increasingly involved in my daily *care* work. I found it more personally interesting than my previous job, one with 'ordinary' children. No wonder that after my release from the Services, while back for undergraduate studies at Oberlin College, I sought out a nearby county home for children to do some volunteer group work. The following summer I became a counselor in Fritz Redl's treatment camp and his treatment center, Pioneer House, in Detroit, Michigan.

Fritz Redl's novel approach and his staff's creative work (Dave Wineman, Mary Lee Nicholson and others) served as models and modes of thinking throughout my professional career. I had thought serving alone as a supervisor/caregiver for 24 children in the state institution was a difficult task. Now, I discovered to my dismay, it was even more taxing to work with *five* children—and that in cooperation with two other counselors at the same time. It wasn't that the children were more complex, rather I learned the real meaning of *care interactions*: the challenge of providing intimate care experience with youngsters who, due to previous severe abuse, recoiled from almost all human interchange. We learned to search for a rich "diet" of daily interactions (fun, play and serious encounters within the context of daily routines of living). These four months of 'frontline' experience provided me with the direction

toward a lifelong belief in *care work* primarily as the vehicle for helping distressed children and youth in 24-hour group care situations. These days I no longer see them as “disturbed” or “pathological.” They are youngsters who have yet to have life experiences which will create a fit for themselves and their respective society.

My studies and closely supervised practicum experience in graduate school of social work served to deepen my knowledge in human relations, social welfare, and the treatment of children. My first professional position after graduation was as a group life supervisor of six units in a residential treatment center in Illinois.

My position and administrative support were great; but it became an uphill struggle to change an institution with a very smooth running custodial program to one of individualized care involvement. Oh, those “easy” days when I could do the work by myself! After three years of continuous progress, frequently punctuated by failures and then again slow success, I took time out for more hands-on work. At the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Clinic I worked as a “group therapist” and for a year I had my only 9-5 regular job. (I should add that these hours were balanced by having my own “unit” at home with three lively young sons!)

A year later, I was asked by the Department of Child Psychiatry and Child Development of the University of Pittsburgh, to assist them with their psychiatric children’s unit, so I was back in the care field; some hands-on, some staff training, and mostly working with an innovative staff studying and experimenting with versatile approaches in the treatment of children with autism. What luck for me to be again in the ‘world’ of care activities and to be mentally, emotionally, and skill-wise challenged (with great associates like Ben Spock, Erik H. Erikson, Earl A. Loomis, Fritz Redl and others!).

The department’s training of our own care staff quickly blossomed into a care and educational course segment in child care and development for students in the Department of Child Psychiatry and Child Development of the University. The latter led to the creation of a full academic program in Child Care and Child Development (1954), the first full-fledged academic curriculum in child care in the United States. It has been, since then, a continuous ‘flagship’ program in our fields. With a deeper involvement in teaching and academia, I discovered the necessity to learn more about what I wanted to teach. Back to the school bench!

My advance studies at the University of Minnesota centered primarily in learning in depth and scope about human, that is, child development and research. My own dissertation focused upon developmental knowledge applied to child and youth care work. With a fresh doctorate under my arm, I accepted a position at the School of Social Work, Uni-

versity of Washington, in Seattle, which from then on became my launching platform.

2. Why Did You Come Into Child and Youth Care?

My biographical sketch highlighted my own enjoyment of group living via scouting and camping and my personal satisfaction in finding success while working with groups. The same seemed to have been true while in social work training where I aligned myself with social group work rather than social casework efforts.

Most important, however, was my own experience in the routinized program of a state institution, in the well furnished children's center with social workers attempting to reconstitute the children's lives, and at the psychiatric children's unit at the Department of Psychiatry of the University of Pittsburgh. In each instance, I recognized that it was the persons involved with the children's or youth's daily life experience, the full engagement in the daily happenings of their play and work, the empathetic control and the heavy tasks of entering in idly through being there. In other words, their *care* which made the difference. In fact, in the residential treatment unit within the Department of Child Psychiatry, the psychiatric staff and residents engaged themselves as care workers in order to establish contact and potentially impactful relationships and thereby creating a possibility for change.

3. Why Did You Stay?

Why not! Once in child and youth care work there was much to learn, to do differently at each new occasion, and keep on searching for new opportunities to share my experience and conviction with an ever widening circle. I oscillated quite a bit between direct care involvement, supervising, training and educating others as well as viewing from afar in research and in considerable writing for publication. Naturally, it is very satisfactory to see one's thoughts in print; but essentially I think my mind, my hands, and my satisfactions continually reflected my "being in the thick with the kids." Their daily struggles with the minutiae of everyday life was also my own, in part for their sake, but I am sure also for my own and our society's. How could I leave with so much yet to be learned and to be done!

4. What Advice or Encouragement Can You Give New Workers?

Enjoy your work with a generation younger than you—even if it

means that it is for some of you only a few years separate from yours. Enjoy the interpersonal aspect of care work—care work involves interactive care.

Get involved with the youngsters and your fellow staff and find a 'diet': one rich in *daily* experience with the youngsters. Hold as your measuring stick: How engaged you and the children are with each other. How much energetic excitement have the children *and* you gained of being with each other in whatever you did. Please do not use the notion: "How good the children were." The latter is apt to measure more likely your control rather than your engagement in their lives. Control has to be a fall-out of your doing things together and finding meaning in them as well as your daily time.

Finally, *do not fear mistakes*. They are not failures but steps to new learning. If you don't make mistakes, you haven't tried; you haven't risked. Almost more than anything else, children and youth in care have to learn to risk life in new ways. Why not you as their caring care person?