

## Message from the Vice-President

Welcome to the age of virtual workshops and education! I had the good fortune to participate in a virtual workshop with Frank Delano, a well know speaker, educator and trainer in the Child and Youth Care field. The workshop I took was on the topic of supervision and it was a very rewarding experience to meet people from around in the world in the comfort of my own home.

Depending on the virtual service provider and your experience with technology, virtual workshops can be a fun or frustrating event. Luckily, I am more or less familiar with the process and am able to figure it out with moderate ease. As a learner, the experience was enlightening and absent of some of the anxieties or discomforts one may feel meeting new people in person.

This allowed me to be more inclined to sharing with the group. When it comes to sharing among a large group of people from various places, there is no difference between the in-person and virtual experience. There was, and will continue to be, that dance at the first pause of conversation of who will add to the discussion first. Being able to connect using meaningful dialogue among like-minded people from different countries and provinces without the need for travel (even though exploring and setting your feet on different soil is fun and exciting) was very special. It really struck me to hear how familiar these stories and experiences being shared related to my work and the work of others close to me, despite the substantial distance between us and differences in services. The similarities in use of language, support, skills, and processes made this experience more and more comfortable for me as the hours passed. These strangers were so caring, fun, helpful, the level of understanding and mindful information sharing was inspiring.

By the end of the workshop, my heart and mind were full. I am aware that here in Manitoba we are not the only ones practicing Child and Youth Care, I suppose my awe was realizing just how similar we are, located worldwide and how connected we can be. Virtual access allows us to go to people and places we otherwise thought we may never be able to reach. CYCWAM is currently planning a virtual workshop for 2022, we hope you will join us. The workshop experience with Frank and colleagues from other parts of Canada and the world, is one I intend on sharing with our Association members in the future.

Chelsea Champagne (She/Her)

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## Mental Health: CYCP's Working In Community

The role of the child and youth care practitioner has expanded tremendously over the last several decades. I know, as it was 40 years ago when I first began in the field when most job opportunities were in group care and treatment facilities. Since that time the value of having a CYCP in a multitude of positions in a broad range of services has witnessed the surge of job opportunities in many areas. We interviewed people who are working in community mental health to gain an understanding of their work. Miggs, Laura and Chantele graciously responded to our questions

*What drew you to work in the community?*

Miggs: My passion for helping everyone feel safe, as well as an understanding of how the structures in the justice system is inherently harmful to Indigenous peoples and POC. The fact that people who want my help are coming to me asking for help also really drew me in to becoming a community worker. Working in programs where participants do not want your help or would much rather be somewhere else, drained my energy. Trying to give and give with the result frequently being 'push back' led to burn out. Currently, I work with people of all walks of life, help people and form trust and rapport with community members and other organizations all working together towards the same goal.



Laura: I had lived experience with mental illness, and multiple people in my family and life struggled with it too. Finding a career in mental health had always been a passion of mine. Originally, I wanted to become a therapist, but to be completely candid I couldn't envision myself in school for that many years! I also loved working with younger children but didn't feel I was reaching my true potential in daycares. I went to an open house at Red River, where you could look at different programs and talk to teachers and past students - and I stumbled upon the CYC room where I met Susan Claire. And in our conversation she posed the question: 'Was I always the person others went to for advice or to talk, was I always the helper or the listener?' and I answered yes. She described the role of a CYCP and it just clicked. I felt: 'yeah I could do this, I could be good at this' and it combines my two passions - I love talking to people, I'm very personable and share my personal experiences regarding mental health to relate to others and help them open up. I wanted a career path that was different every day, a job where I worked closely with people - building connections - I knew a career working in the mental health community would be a perfect fit.

*Who and or what inspires you in your CYC practice?*

Miggs: My co-workers inspire me to keep going every day, but most importantly those people sitting in bus shelters as the weather gets colder and still finding a reason to smile and throw a joke my way are just a few the motivators I keep getting up every day to come into work. They are resilient and surviving in a society that has failed them. I want to be part of the reason that society changes and views these communities in a different light.

Laura: The participants I work with everyday. Seeing their growth, their confidence, and their perseverance. The things they've been through that I can't even begin to relate to - but it's such a powerful experience to be part of something that on your end may seem small, but on their end is massive and may be that one or two steps they needed to be successful. Also, sometimes the lack of resources and the broken system and the trials and tribulations are what inspire me...inspire me to be better - learn everyday so I can be part of the positive changes.

*What training, education, life experience benefits your work in mental health in the community?*

Miggs: I think my experience working in a managed care was an asset to my work in the community. I learned many different ways to engage with youth, and people in general. It allowed me to really see the benefit of forming trust and rapport with someone, as well as the importance of time and patience when trying to support others who may have challenging behaviours. Struggling with addiction, suicidal ideation, gender identity, and self-harm in my personal life has helped shape me into a more understanding, patient, and empathetic CYC. It has allowed me to put myself in another person's shoes more clearly and let me relate to them in a way that I wouldn't be able to otherwise, whether I disclose this information to that person or not.

Laura: Lived experience with mental illness is a huge component of my professional development. Plus, on the job training - actually experiencing the work yourself. You can go to school and read every textbook however first-hand experience is extremely valuable. Watching others, seeing interactions, building up your confidence in talking with others. As well, any type of mental health training, such as ASIST is very valuable. Education is tough for me. Education will be a benefit absolutely, however a degree doesn't always mean you will be the best candidate for the job. Knowledge is important but the key to being a strong helper is the passion, the openness, willingness to learn and grow, empathy - some of these things, you can't teach.

*Any advice you would give to others working in the field?*

Miggs: If I had to give any advice to others working in the field, it would be to have patience with yourself and the people you are supporting. To practice self-care, be gentle with yourself and always self-reflect and work towards trying new things. Don't be afraid to go out of your comfort zone because I think that's why I've grown the most as a CYC. The most important thing that I try to live by is be genuine in all my interactions, including with myself. To me, this means being honest with myself and others and realizing that I'm not a perfect human being and that I always have room to grow, as well it is okay to make room for others to also be part of this process.



Laura: Enjoy the work. Allow yourself to feel your emotions. Have healthy coping strategies for your own mental health. Balance your time, know that you are valuable, and you need to be healthy and happy in order to do the best work, so take care of yourself first and foremost. It can seem very hard at first, because natural helpers always think of others, but you are just as important. Do not feel the weight of other people's mistakes too much. You are there as a support and to help, but people need to make decisions for themselves, and you will not help everyone. You will have good days and bad days, but the good will outweigh the bad. If they aren't, it may be time for a new position, or place. Don't always think it's the career path (personally, I was burnt out really bad at my last job. But it wasn't the field, it was the place and the

management) so don't jump to conclusions. This field also may not be for you, and that's okay. Don't ever feel bad for doing the things YOU want to do in life. Be patient. Don't ever be afraid to ask for help when needed. Play to your strengths. Have hope.

*What are the challenges working in the community?*

Miggs: I think the challenges working in the community are having to work with folks who may have very different perspectives on things happening in the community (like unsheltered folks living in bus shelters, for example). Not prioritizing someone else's needs over another and also facing the hard truth with someone that sometimes, it can be raining and freezing cold but there are no shelter beds available, and someone may have to stay outside for the night. This isn't a reflection on you as a worker or on them as a human being it is only a reflection of society and its priorities. For me, this was one of the hardest things to learn to do, to be honest with someone and sit with them in that moment knowing that I get to go home to a warm bed at the end of the night while they stay in a corner of a back lane all night just trying to stay dry and warm.

Laura: There are multiple challenges I face every day working with mental health. You are listening to some pretty sad stories a lot of the time, sometimes participants can have bad days and take it out on you, you can't really escape that realm. I am so passionate about mental health, but you do need to make sure you have a work/personal life balance. I deal with mental health both at work and personally, so it's important to make sure you aren't so burnt out in one area, that it seeps into the other. Mental illness is hard. It's hard to listen to, to witness, to help with. You can't take things personally, and you can't believe you are going to help everyone. Don't get me wrong - have hope. Be patient. Keep up your passion for helping. But also know, people need to help themselves, and the burden cannot always fall on you to be what changes them. It's a tough thing to learn when you go into this field. Most CYCPS are empaths, and feel things deeply. We just need to make sure we are helping to the best of our capabilities.

*Why is the work satisfying? - What keeps you hopeful?*

Miggs: I think the most satisfying part of my job is being recognized by the community for the work that we do and those shouts from their cars, "You guys are awesome!" are what keeps me going even on the hardest of days. What keeps me hopeful is that more and more people are realizing the importance of community work and how beneficial our approach and interactions are, and will continue to be, for the community as a whole. What also keeps me going is those people who I have helped who come back and say: "I remember you, you helped me with x, y, and z, and now I'm doing much better because of what you did". Sometimes it's just the simple thank you and the acknowledgement to how I may have helped steer someone down a different path. It is also very satisfying to me when someone calls us before WPS and says they would rather we come to attend a call – it demonstrates that what I am doing works.

I will also add that to me, I have been much happier and my mental health has been so much better since leaving my previous job. I feel like I have more of a purpose and like I am making more of a difference, maybe because I can see it more in the short term rather than the long term. I never have a dull moment and come across all sorts of incidents, interactions, and behaviours. I learn something new every day while at work! It has also really opened up my eyes to just how resilient some of these folks are and helped me to be more grateful and appreciative of the little things in life that I may have taken for granted beforehand.

Laura: It's a satisfying feeling ~ you're making a difference in someone's life. Even your own. I feel the best with myself when I am helping others. When I'm using my skills and talents to the best of my ability. When I'm getting to connect with others on a deeper level, have conversations, relate, laugh, bring some joy. What keeps me hopeful is the feeling after you've helped someone - knowing that you chose to see them and meet them where they're at. I feel I am someone who has infinite hope, a bit of a dreamer perhaps. But I think I need that for this line of work. I'm an eternal optimist and sure some days get me down, but I am hopeful for change, hopeful for the future and I want to be a part of the future of mental health practices.

*I would like to end with Chantele's thoughts, a seasoned helper in the field and their reflections on community work*

What drew me to work in the community was my helper nature as well as going through a rough childhood. I wanted to be the person I needed back then for other youth going through tough times. The fact that I went through a hard childhood and a hard time during my youth helps in my practice. It helps being able to relate and not having negative beliefs regarding struggling youth. My education also helps, and I hope to never stop getting degrees in different helper fields...but I'm a school keeper – I find the learning environment of a college and university very stimulating and satisfying.

Advice I would give to others is make sure you are in this field for the right reasons. If you have any biases, if you have any part of you that is racist, homophobic, transphobia, etc., then this job is not for you. Don't think you're going to change the world in a day but realize that all the tiny differences you make can change someone's world.

The biggest challenges for me are helping people through all the systemic barriers and discrimination that is prevalent in our systems. What keeps me hopeful is that without my help it would be even harder for some of the people with whom I work. Even by being there I am helping. I may not ever change the world, but I have helped to change the world for some people.

*Thank you to all our CYCP interviewees for their candid, open and heartfelt responses.  
And thank you for your work in the community.*

*Susan Claire Johnson (she/her)*

We respectfully recognize that the places we work are located on original lands of Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation.



Jessie Home



Neecheewam



Peacepipe Family  
Wellness Centre

