

Section Four

Celebrating success – youth in care networking

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**Celebrating success: perspectives of Youth in Care
Networking**

Teresa Lum and Nicole Herbert

**Improving outcomes for young people leaving care: Which
way forward?**

Sue Green and Amanda Jones

**CREATE: A foundation of opportunities with and for children
and young people in care**

(Reprinted from CAFnet, Vol.3, No.4, 1999)

**Children and young people in care – the conference
connection:**

- **Interview with Andy**
- **Why is it soooo trendy to have children and young people
in care at conferences?**

(Reprinted from Illusion Free Zone, Vol.1, No.3)

Fostering the future

**11th biennial
IFCO conference**

Melbourne, July 1999

Celebrating success

Perspectives of youth in care networking

Teresa Lum and Nicole Herbert

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Fostering the future

11th biennial IFCO conference

Melbourne, July 1999



Teresa Lum has worked and is currently a support person for the Federation of British Columbia Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN), for which she has been awarded an Honorary Life Membership. This organisation works with youth in and from care between 14 and 24 years of age, offering support, education, advocacy and friendship. Over the past two years, Ms Lum has focused on educating social workers, caregivers and the community on the issues and concerns of youth in care. Ms Lum was in care from the age of 12 years and has lived in a number of placements including group homes, residential care and finally with a wonderful foster family, who are now the godparents of her children.

Nicole Herbert, a former young person in care, was instrumental in the establishment of the Youth in Care Network in British Columbia and the national development of the Youth in Care Network.

The United Nations has proclaimed and agreed that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The United Nations has proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance.

The United Nations is convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community.

The United Nations recognizes that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

The United Nations considers that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.

Excerpts from (preamble) the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991)

CELEBRATING SUCCESS

The purpose of IFCO conferences and our bond as youth in/from care and adults who work with us is:

our belief in and commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child *must* be used to ensure children and youth have the opportunity to become happy and healthy members and contributors to society, regardless of where they live or their circumstances.

A huge international undertaking and success!

Celebrating success requires that we:

- **First define it!**

The favourable end or result of an undertaking

A person or thing that turns out well

To make known with praise; to honor (celebrate)

- **Learn to recognize it!**

Look for the big accomplishments

Look for the little everyday steps

- **Commit to acknowledging it!**

Tell them you noticed

Be specific about what you notice

EVERYDAY CELEBRATIONS

'It's the little things that often mean the most.'

- Recognize – the desire and effort to make positive changes
- Acknowledge – the little steps taken and outcomes of their perseverance
- Reward – the positive achievements appropriately
- Encourage and support – the ideas and next steps

Be genuinely curious about what they're interested in.

Get to know them as a person! (keep in mind – there's a fine line between caring curiosity and being nosy)

Let them know you remember them on occasions special to them!

Share your observations of them, and the effect they have had, with them

Highlighting personal or self-improvements can do a lot for self-esteem!

Identifying the positive reactions of others promotes relationship building!

Be helpful.

Don't 'do for', do with!

Provide them with tools and guidance and be there when they need you... (to listen, to give feedback, or to cheer them on!)

Examples

- Birthdays
- Events (religious, traditional/cultural, etc.)
- School (grades, attendance, assignments, etc.)
- Recreational (sports, art, music, writing, theatre, etc.)
- Awards and special recognition (achievements, humanitarian/volunteer work, etc.)
- Anniversaries (alcohol/drug sobriety, completion of probation, etc.)
- Personal improvements (better choices, behaviors, helpfulness, perseverance, etc.)

UNIFICATION

'Partnerships for sustaining healthier young people, in or out of their natural families.'

- Youth (in/from care)
- Caregivers
- Service providers
- Natural parents (family)
- Members of the community and other professionals

It's important to develop reasonable roles and responsibilities for members of the 'team'!

Who should be involved in the decision-making process and why?

Everyone should be working together in the best interests of the young person!

What are the young person's needs now and for the future?

Never underestimate a young person's capacity to understand!

Clear communication, active listening skills and lots of patience are key. (Be objective, be simple, be specific, try to see from their perspective.)

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE

Foster Care : a professional family

- Foster parents need to be recognized for the challenging work they do.
- Foster parents need skills and tools to provide quality care for young people.
- Young people need safe, nurturing, family environment to grow in.
- Young people react negatively to words like 'professional' (language has a huge impact on young people, not unlike adults).
- Create a balance? 'Professional foster /care family'

BUILDING ON RESEARCH FOR BETTER PRACTICE

'By ensuring the rights of children and youth are respected, their needs will be better met. Meeting the needs of young people, including support and assistance, will increase their chances of successful independence.'

- Justice – % of youth in custody with 'care' background(s)

- Health – % of youth in 'care' with known health issues
- Welfare – % of youth in 'care' that graduate to adult welfare

Providing the basics : (shelter, food and clothing)

Providing safety : (from neglect, abuse and exploitation)

Providing health care : (injury and illness treatment, counseling, recovery and rehabilitation)

Providing education and employment : (independent living skills, academics and vocation)

Providing recreation : (rest and leisure time, artistic opportunities and healthy activities)

Providing love : (caring, nurturing, affection, humour, stability, encouragement and support)

Providing positive mentors : (modeling positive relationships, healthy lifestyles, boundaries, consistency, well-informed decision-making, discipline and everything listed above too!)

Being in/from care vs. never having been in care:

Family (continuity and stability)

Leaving home (age, support and fallback)

Independence skills (opportunity to develop, strength of relationship and connections)

Stigma/stereotypes (labels and self-esteem)

ACKNOWLEDGING GOOD OUTCOMES (AND INNOVATIONS)

'Throughout our lives, we will each encounter many turning points. Quite often, these turning points are moments of new understanding, caused by the impact of other people's experiences and/or actions. When inspired to learn, we grow beyond ourselves.'

Teresa's turning points:

- Getting caught skipping school by the Gannys
 - not getting beaten
 - participated in decision about punishment

- what's wrong with these people?
- Daughter Tia slapping back
 - used a '3 strikes and you're out' system for discipline
 - one day she slapped back
 - dilemma about discipline cycle and new alternatives

Nicole's turning points:

- Coast 2 Coast train trip and Network Buffet
 - professionally planned, implemented and managed by young people
 - the sharing, support and learning by young people created a new family
 - young people can do amazing things for each other!
- Relationship with mom and dad
 - loss of dad ...
 - struggle with mom ...
 - guilt, forgiveness and the future ...

SUSTAINING SUPPORT NETWORKS

'By coming together, we are not alone.'

Today, there are Youth in/from Care Networks all over the world!

- Canada (National Youth in Care Network plus over 50 active groups)
- Australia (co-hosts of IFCO 1999)
- Ireland
- Scotland
- England
- Hungary
- Jamaica
- Japan
- Netherlands
- Belgium.

Successful groups = youth make realistic decisions based on the needs,

Point us in the right direction ...
do not run that way
and expect us to follow.
Remember it is best to let us learn
from our own mistakes,
as you have learned from yours.
Do not stand in front of us
for our own protection;
Instead, stand beside us and
whisper your wisdom in our ears.
Let us lead the way,
for the future is not for you,
The future is ours to live.

Nicole E Herbert
(a former youth in care)

Written for the Federation of BC Youth in Care
Networks and youth in care networking

issues and ideas of their peers, with input and support from adults.

Fundamentals:

- Support – each other through outreach and by coming together.
- Educate – youth about their rights/adults about youth needs, issues and ideas.
- Advocate – for change with a united voice (representing youth diversity).

Making change without making enemies ...

- Get involved in what exists, help start something new, and help to change lives.
- Different perspectives are valuable.
- Working with the system instead of against it will yield more long-term results.

- Don't burn your bridges, you (or someone else) may need to cross one later!

GROWING UP AND GOING ON

'God, please don't let me get old. Don't let me forget what it's like to be a kid, and don't let me turn into my parents! If you haven't said it, you will ...'

Learning to let go:

- Relationships - not a good match and growing apart
- Responsibilities - changing times and faces
- Feelings - guilt, anger and regret

Leaving 'the Network':

- Preparing for the inevitable - talk about it with everyone
- Transition time - give yourself time to gear down slowly
- Your new role - stay involved as a support person (?)

Next steps in continued progress:

1. Today – get to know the youth here.
2. The rest of the conference – learn as much as possible.
3. When you get home – support, educate and advocate.

'Know in your hearts, each and every one of you, that change is within your power. Embrace the knowledge, skills and abilities of the people around you. Be inspired to share and learn and grant yourself the freedom to grow beyond who you limit yourself to being. Believe in the ideas of the children and youth of today and tomorrow and give them reason to believe in you. Doubt not your strength to carry on, instead find passion enough to ignite the light that flickers within each of us.' □