

## CARE Conference Perceptions by Samuel Mammen

When I look back I am amazed by the impact Children And Residential Experiences -CARE and Therapeutic Crisis Intervention - TCI training has brought into my child and youth care practise since my training in 2012. It further amazes me as I recollect stories of how CARE trained youth workers are facilitating and supporting our youth in their path to progress as they grow into their purpose. It was of great joy to be given the opportunity to attend the Fourth RCCP International conference in Lake George; I am thankful to my directors at Oak Hill Boys Ranch for this opportunity. I was also privileged to present at this conference on Children And Residential Experiences (CARE) compatibility within the context of Indian family and education.

I was excited to be at this conference but wasn't sure of what all to expect; the diverse ethnicity and nationality of delegates was a real treat. Before long I was connecting with international youth work practitioners and listening to their experiences in countries like Israel, South Korea and many European countries. This conference also became a venue for me to meet and connect with practitioners from my city - Edmonton and neighbouring Canadian provinces for the first time.

The opening of this conference with the music from Hillside Youth Voice Band spread an aura of hope and positivity. Their testimonials and words were affirming the importance of our work with children and families. The three keynote sessions were flowing in a thematic progression. Anthony Burrow's session on "Purpose in life" reaffirmed and provided evidence on the vital importance of being hopeful and purpose driven in our work. Purpose is a compass. You never arrive, the compass leads you. Goal is attainable while purpose is driving your journey. The group is highly likely to reach to their goal with leadership of a purpose driven leader or a teacher. These excerpts from that session that resonates in my heart. Howard Bath's "Translating Trauma: From complexity to clarity" was educative and apt for my work with traumatized young persons and in meeting their traumagenic needs. Junlei Li in his session - Simple interactions as the active ingredients for Human development emphasized that it is through relationships that we grow and learn best. His quote from Fred Rogers - "Everyone of us longs to know that there is something about us that is worth giving" encouraged me to efficiently provide simple quality interactions to our youth and their families. He highlighted three words - notice, wonder and growth in this session. The keynote by John Lyons on Transformation Collaborative Outcomes Management was helpful to me in the context of Alberta (my province) adopting Collaborative Service Delivery model. The session focused on a framework for managing complex system with professionals having different perspectives and often competing responsibilities and objectives. The tensions that results from these conflicts are best managed by keeping focus on common objectives - a shared vision; which in our work is the person served (children and family).

The parallel featured speakers sessions were equally relevant and I didn't want to miss any. After assessing my short and long term goals; I selected the sessions and I was impressed by all of them. The level of preparation and the gamut of knowledge presenters shared was not comparable to other conferences I have attended. The session on Understanding and Addressing Non - Suicidal Self-Injury was a good choice for me considering the relevance this topic in my everyday practise. The private logic of the young person and some suggestions of how to deal with such incidents was my take away from this session. The workshop - Research report on use of Life Space Interview in residential settings highlighted success and shed light into similar challenges faced across agencies in US and UK. The practise writing workshop was the my selection. The two part session provided opportunity to be discussing and learning from established writers; hearing about their struggles, strategies they use to get over their writers' block and ways they refine ideas was very helpful. This session also provided me a platform to be added to the group of aspiring writers and receive guidance from other writers.

It was my privilege to present on (CARE) compatibility within the context of Indian family and education. The presentation focused on educating participants on the strengths and values of ancient Indian family and education (gurukula) system. The presentations also included the potential pitfalls of ushering in modernization within Indian family and society. The photos and experiences of CARE practitioners visiting various boarding schools in India was also part of the presentation.

The brilliant idea of “the community of practise forum” was a unique feature of this conference. The idea of table topics and COP morning sessions facilitated connecting and discussing topics of interest among practitioners who have shared interests.

The dinner cruise was a leisurely ending to a busy day two. The spectacular view of lake George combined with opportunity to meet, converse and share experiences with other practitioners was a delight.

Xavier McElrath-Bey’s “No child is born bad” was the best culmination session. In his speech there was no blaming or shaming; instead he focused on his feelings and need for safety and belonging he experienced as a child in care. It was remarkable that he noted the genuine quality interaction he had with a staff who was part of the reason for the loss of his friend while at a group home. Xavier ended the session with lots of hope. He today has become a voice and advocate for the need of many young people in similar situations.

The experiences and comments from the panel of youth and families moderated by James Anglin followed by a closing session by Martha Holden marked the end of the three day conference. I walked out of the conference head held high with confidence and exceptional learning which becomes my impetus to do even better child and youth care work with the children and families I am connected to every day. The exemplary planning, organizing and team work of Cornell staff produced a successful conference creating a positive energy and lasting connections between residential child and youth care practitioners across many nations.

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