

# **Making Moments Meaningful in Child & Youth Care Practice**



**Editors**

**Thom Garfat, Leon Fulcher and John Digney**



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*Edited by*  
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# Making Moments Meaningful in Daily Life

Welcome to our book about making moments meaningful through the Therapeutic Use of Daily Life Events. Welcome to the old, the updated, and the new. We say it like that because the use of daily life events has been around for a long time, is constantly being revisited or revised and new ideas emerge frequently – as this book of readings will demonstrate.

The questions which underlay the Therapeutic Use of Daily Life Events are these:

- How do we make an everyday life event meaningful for a young person?
- How do we make what might otherwise be an ordinary or ‘fleeting’ moment more meaningful?
- How do we ensure that our best effort to make a single event or moment, with this young person as helpful, therapeutic and purposefully meaningful as it can be?

Those are, in many ways, the ultimate questions for our work – whether we name ourselves as Child and Youth Care Worker, Youth Worker, Social Pedagogue, Social Care Worker or any one of our numerous different names. If we want to be as effective as we can be and if we want to be as helpful as we can be in assisting a young person to move on to a place of less pain and trouble,

then we need to wonder about how we can make the most of every minute we have with her or him. After all, the longer it takes, the longer they are in pain.

The articles in this book are intended to 'deepen' your knowledge in the areas of a Child and Youth Care Approach and the Use of Daily Life Events. In many ways this book of Readings contains less than it could have because there is a wealth of information available to us all on the importance and relevance of using daily life events. Much additional information can be found at the *International Child & Youth Care Network* [www.cyc-net.org](http://www.cyc-net.org) from where some of the materials in this book have been drawn. We encourage you to go there and explore even deeper this aspect of helping troubled young people and their families.

So take your time, read, enjoy and make this reading time a meaningful moment for yourself. After all, meaningful moments are as important for us as for anyone.

*Thom, Leon and John*

2013



# 1

## The meaningful use of everyday life events in child and youth

Thom Garfat

It seems unclear when the expression “*the use of everyday life events*” first entered the child and youth care literature. Probably, like many things in our field, it slipped in silently like a kid unsure if she belonged. Yet this expression succeeded in capturing the heart of child and youth. Indeed, it has come to be the most defining characteristic of what we call a Child and Youth Care approach (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012).

Similar expressions have appeared from time to time, as others have expressed the idea that child and youth care involves, as Fritz Redl (1959) said, ‘exploiting’ the events that occur during the daily life of a child in care, for the benefit of that child (Fox, 1995). Redl’s expression was not readily incorporated into the field, probably because of the political associations attached to the word ‘exploiting’. Redl, of course, was talking about *taking advantage of* (another politically sensitive expression) events, as they occur in the life space of the child. While the words may not have caught on, the intention certainly did. Just as the definition of child and youth care has come to include ‘the relational’ (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2008; Garfat & Fulcher, 2012) and the meaning of ‘life-space’ has changed (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2013) so has the meaning of the phrase ‘daily life events’. Whereas it used to

refer primarily to what we might call the routines and rituals of everyday life (meals, bedtimes, etc.), it has come to refer to all the moments which occur in the life-space. Making these moments meaningful is what has led the field to include the word 'therapeutic' as in 'the therapeutic use of daily life events'.

## **Making moments meaningful**

Maier (1987) encouraged us to attend to and use 'the minutiae' of everyday life, the little things, the small, seemingly unimportant events out of which the days of our lives are constructed: things like waiting for meal-times, occasions of leave-taking, or just coming into contact with one another. Followers of Redl suggest the use of life space interviews in which the child and youth care worker takes advantage of a singular event or moment (such as an argument between two youth) as it is occurring or immediately after it occurs, specifically entering into the immediate life of the child (Brendtro & Long, 2002). Peterson (1988) suggested watching for naturally occurring therapeutic opportunities that present themselves in the course of daily living. Guttman (1991) suggested that child and youth care workers must enter into the flow of immediacies of the child's experiencing. In this way they can use interventions which are congruent with the flow of that experiencing (Fulcher, 1991). Entering into this flow of experiencing as it is occurring, and helping the child to live differently in the context within which the child and worker find themselves (Fewster, 1990), is central to impactful child and youth care practice. This focus on what we might call *joint experiencing* between child and worker, and the facilitation of the opportunity for change within this joint experiencing highlights the commonly identified CYC characteristic of 'doing with'. In many ways, it is what distinguishes our work from the interventive efforts of other professionals. In impactful child and youth care practice, the worker becomes, with the child, the co-creator of a therapeutic context (Durrant, 1993; Maier, 1994; Peterson, 1988) within which the child might experience the opportunity for change. This focus on the joint experiencing of what Garfat (2008) called

the *in-between between us* is the essence of contemporary, relational Child and Youth Care Practice (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012) for it is through the everyday moments and opportunities that we might find the pathway to the creation of the truly relational experience.

Recent writings have demonstrated the use of daily life events in education, training, supervision, family work community and many other areas (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012). Further, as Gharabaghi (2013) suggests, we are even finding ways to be present in the everyday moments of peoples' lives when we are not 'physically there'. Building on our powerful history, we are finding ways to make all moments meaningful.

## Requirements

Child and youth care practice has evolved over time, and the expression 'the use of daily life events' might be rephrased as 'the entering into, and meaningful use of, daily life events, as they are occurring, for the therapeutic benefit of the child, youth or family'. Such practice involves numerous skills, knowledge and ability on the part of child and youth care workers. They must, for example,

- have knowledge of child development (Maier, 1987),
- understand how to access and use that knowledge (Eisikovits, Beker, & Guttmann, 1991),
- know about the process of change (Garfat, Fulcher & Digney, 2012),
- possess an active self-awareness which allows the worker to distinguish self from other (Garfat, 1994; Ricks, 1989),
- be able to enter into an intimate caring relationship (Austin & Halpin, 1987, 1989) that involves attachment (Maier, 1993) and belonging (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 2002),
- understand the process of meaning-making (Bruner, 1990; Krueger, 1994; VanderVen, 1992),
- have a framework for organizing their interventive

actions (Eisikovits, Beker, & Guttman, 1991; Garfat & Newcomen, 1992).

- understand the meaning and dynamics of relational practice (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012).
- understand how relationships create the life-space (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2013).

All of this is necessary for recognising, using or even creating opportunities in the daily life events of a child, youth or family's life. This use of daily life events as they are occurring is one of the foundational characteristics that distinguish child and youth care practice from other forms of helping — which may also use daily life events, but at a distance removed from the immediacy of the experience itself.

The child and youth care focus on making everyday moments meaningful and therapeutic has been one of the most profound evolutions of our field and the more we focus on making moments meaningful in this way, the more helpful we will be to the young people and families with whom we work.

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