



The Real “Money in the Bank”: Building Relationships in Child and Youth Care

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One of the many things I have cherished since becoming increasingly connected to the international Child and Youth Care community over the years is the wonderful shared importance placed on the rhythms, ceremonies and traditions of our work. When I was asked to write an article for the 200th edition of *CYC-Online* I felt appropriately honored and wanted to pick an apropos topic to write about. That turned into quite a struggle for me. I guess over the years I have become most recognized in the Child and Youth

Care world for my work, presentations,, and writings on supervision and leadership, but somehow I kept procrastinating in deciding on a topic and this one did not make it for the 200th edition. I remembered that when the Indian author Arundhati Roy was heavily pressured to write another novel after her earth shaking “The God of Small Things” she said that these subjects were her passion and she could not write another work “until it just dances out of me”. The importance of quality supervision for Child and Youth

Care workers is certainly a passion of mine, but since nothing was “dancing out of me” I decided to approach it by thinking of what the primary foundation of my entire career has been (inclusive of supervision)...and finally the idea “danced out”.

Long before I put a label on it the foundational core that has guided my work with children, and my belief system about our work, is what I now refer to as “Money in the Bank”. Of course, it is not the legal tender version of money, but the relational money that we can deposit with a child based on building positive relationships, respect, genuine caring, and continually refining “the art” of our work with children. Without any education in Child and Youth Care, and with no experience working with children, from my first day in the field as a direct Child and Youth Care worker I instinctively understood this work was primarily relational above all else.

I first used the actual “Money in the Bank” label when I became the Associate Director of a very large residential treatment center near New York City. I had been the Director of the adolescent girls’ program for two years prior to that. In that unit we had been successful in creating a non-violent culture and fully eliminating restraints of children. However, in moving into the larger position within the agency I was inheriting overview of three boys’ units where the number of restraints were still astronomically high. As a way to send a strong message that restraining children was not an acceptable

practice I decided to teach the Cornell Therapeutic Crisis Intervention course myself, along with a direct service Child and Youth Care worker. This would allow for the message of restraint reduction/elimination and the emphasis on a relational approach to be coming straight from the program executive level. I originally described “Money in the Bank” in that course as building relationship currency with a child so there was something to “draw out” in times of crisis. I would explain that many times when a child would be escalating in crisis a Child and Youth Care worker would walk in on it and the mood would come right down to a calmer level. Other workers would walk in and the mood would immediately get more agitated. I theorized this was not about the position of the stars that day. It was more about how much the ‘relational money’ the worker had deposited with the child that created a certain level of safety for the child. That sense of safety could help them calm down just by the worker’s presence.

The philosophy and term were very attractive to many of our higher caliber workers and before long “Money in the Bank” became part of the agency culture. The term would be used regularly among workers and in meetings. As time went on I became more aware of how often when we built a relationship with a child we would be frustrated by not always seeing the healthy growth in the child we hoped for while they were still in the program. It occurred to me how often a child would leave the program and workers would feel



pessimistic about that child's future. Then, perhaps years later, the child would get back in touch with the worker and be doing quite well in life. They would so often refer to something the worker said or did in the moment (many times the worker did not even remember it) that always stuck with them as a guiding force in their life. I then expanded the "Money in the Bank" concept to include the idea that any relationship money we deposit stays there after the child leaves the program and is there for them to "draw out" at various times later in life. In trying to define the art of "Money in the Bank" I suggest:

"Money in the Bank" is the relationship money a Child and Youth Care worker "deposits" with a child in the continuous course of being with that child. The sense of safety and trust this "relationship money" builds may be drawn out in a crisis time to help a child compose themselves, or simply stay with the children when they leave care to be drawn out many years later.

It is widely accepted that those of us who choose to dedicate our life's work to Child and Youth Care are not likely to make a lot of money and become rich in the monetary sense. But, I think we also know how much "richer" we are than most because of the many precious moments we experience when we build positive relationships with the children we work with. It is, for us, the real "Money in the Bank". There are many ways get rich in this way and I will outline a few below. Since Child and Youth Care work is so

much about relationships, and there are so many "stories" that capture key moments in our work, I will illustrate a number of ways a Child and Youth Care worker can put "Money in the Bank" with a child by sharing some reflections below.

Be a \$7 for \$5 worker

Bill Russell played 13 years for the Boston Celtics. His team won 11 National Basketball Association championships during that period and he was clearly the centerpiece of those teams. He was very gifted athletically, but was not the best physical athlete in the sport and was often outsized at his position. When asked what the key to his unrivaled success in being a key player in winning championships was he said simply "When I was young my father told me "Son, when a man pays you \$5 for a day's work you always give him \$7 worth of work". Child and Youth Care workers who want to deposit money in the bank should strive to be that 7 for 5 worker. In a speech given to new Child and Youth Care Workers in Durban, Ernie Nightingale (2000) spoke of the importance of the commitment to "hang in there" when times are tough. He said that some of the best Child and Youth Care workers he knew had understood the importance of this kind of commitment in their practice and prioritized it. One special example of a \$7 for \$5 commitment would be a story that involves Holly, a girl who lived in the residential unit I was Director of back in the 1980's. Holly got back in touch after some years and she

and I connected to co-train a workshop on “Money in the Bank” (by then she was in her late 30’s and very stable in life with a successful career). The training was set up to take a look at how this “relational money” was viewed by her as a 16-year-old in the program and me as Director back then as well as how she and I viewed it presently. The audience included both Child and Youth Care workers and teenage girls in care from a similar unit to hers when she was in our program. In an unrehearsed moment I asked her to share a particular example of a way that a worker made a “large deposit” with her. She recalled Margaret as her favorite Child and Youth Care worker. Margaret was the senior worker in that cottage. She worked a full time job in the business world and then five nights a week from 5:30pm to midnight as a Child and Youth Care worker. She had a “tough” exterior with very strict rules about respect and keeping a clean house. However, the girls also knew she was also “a softie” inside. She was able to nurture and show love to the girls long before we dared put that word to it in Child and Youth Care. Holly shared that she felt very safe with Margaret and sometimes when the overnight worker was new, or not reliable, she would purposely create a crisis in the unit so that Margaret would have to stay past midnight to help the other worker settle everyone down. She would then spend time to talk to Holly to settle her down. By that time, with Margaret’s presence, the rest of the girls were sleeping and Holly could feel safer with the overnight person there.

When I asked Holly what made that so special she simply said “Margaret never once looked at her watch during those times”. Voila, “Money in the Bank”! There are many other ways a worker can show the kind of commitment to earn the reputation with children as a \$7 for \$5 worker. These might include coming in a half hour early (even without getting paid!) on days where a big recreation trip is happening to be sure all was prepared, bringing in a special homemade treat for a unit party, being willing to “risk your practice” some by being extra reflective in a supervision session about your struggles as a way to grow professionally, etc.

Believe in “the goodness of kids”

I believe one of the best developments in Child and Youth Care practice over the past number of years has been more and more programs establishing a focused “strengths based” philosophy of care. Training workers to think and respond in a ‘strengths’- based way will have many positive impacts. A key one is that much “money in the bank” can be deposited by a genuine belief on the Child and Youth Care worker’s part in the “goodness of kids”. One of the more poignant and heart-wrenching reminders of the importance of this came a couple of years ago when Jill Shah and I were asked to visit a 30-day Youth Shelter program in Texas to make recommendations on how they could improve their services and adopt a “control to collaboration” process in working with youth in the shelter. The



program was in deep trouble at the time and someone at a senior management level was temporarily coming down a number of organizational levels to take over the shelter to stabilize it. Their mission talked of a having a “home like environment” for kids between placements. After a day of visiting the program in action, as well as interviewing staff and kids, we suggested to the senior manager the best place to start the transition was to hear clearly that in the full day there we didn’t see even one “home-like” thing in the program. The senior manager was a very sound professional. She took that very well and was even more motivated for change. Of

course, we couldn’t bring that particular opinion to all of the staff without (possibly) insulting them beyond repair. However, we did need to grab their attention at the end of day one. During the day in an interview with one of the 15 year old girls we asked her: “What is the one biggest thing you want to leave with from this program? What is most important to you as a person? What will you want to look back on in twenty years about your time here at the shelter?” This tough-looking girl whom the staff described as needy and sometimes greedy about concrete things had



tears well up in her eyes and said very thoughtfully, with a painful sadness, “Well, it hasn’t happened yet in my 20 days here, but I would like for just once, only one time, the adults here not to believe I’ll do the wrong thing”. After the tears dried up in our eyes we brought that example to the table at the end of day summary with

all the staff. It was the one thing that grabbed the most of their attention. “Someone believes in me” is a message that will lead to a deposit of a fortune of “money in the bank”.

Being “present in the moment”

As Holly’s story shows so clearly, youth find it extremely important

for the Child and Youth Care worker to be “present in the moment” (Masson, 2000). VanderVen (1991) points out that one of the things that makes Child and Youth Care work so special and unique is the work done in the “life-space” of the child. I remember Thom Garfat, in an informal discussion, talking about how important it was for Child and Youth Care workers to notice those “bids for connections” that youth will make. The Child and Youth Care worker has to consistently be present in the moment to notice those “bids” and much money can be deposited

in the relational bank from noticing them. Of course, many youth in care show these bids in ways that may be aggressive, somewhat anti-social looking, appearing disinterested, with loud talking when the worker is talking to another close by, etc. It is important the worker notice the bid and later seek the child out and invite them to talk about it in a private space. Just the fact the worker noticed the bid puts a deposit in the bank and much “money” can be added by showing the child an interest in understanding what it meant. I remember once on a recreation trip asking a youth who was normally shy and very cooperative to sit in the row behind me in the van on the way back to the center. When entering the van he went right by that seat, ignoring my instructions, and sat in the back row. I let it go and the next day asked him what that was about. He apologized and told me he had a crush on one of the girls on the trip, had been too afraid to talk with her, and when he saw an empty seat by her he decided to sit near her. As a reminder of what mindset being in residential care can create in a child he then asked if he was in trouble. I assured him he was not and asked how it went with the girl. He said he still didn’t talk with her in the van. That led to a twenty-minute talk between us about ideas on how he could approach her again. He profusely thanked me for my advice after the discussion (I don’t remember if he got the girl in the end though!).

Don’t forget your sense of humor

Nancy was a girl in our program who came into my office one day to ask if I could help her with spelling and grammar in a letter she was writing to “her judge” back in her hometown. She explained the judge had a special interest in her and she wanted to write to him. I replied of course and was feeling quite joyful she was being this responsible. She quickly said “Ok, I’ll just leave it with you”, and left almost before it was fully in my hand. I was busy and put the letter aside for an hour. When I read it I was startled. She was telling the judge she didn’t need to be in residential treatment, how all the other girls were “crazy”, and how awful it was for a Director (me) for not recognizing this. She went on for a paragraph or two questioning my intelligence, my knowledge, whether I ever worked with kids before this, etc., etc. A day later she came back in my office sheepishly, apparently realizing her strategy to give the letter to me may not have been the wisest. “Where is that letter?” she asked carefully. I told her she had done a pretty good job with composing it, I had made some corrections and asked if she needed a stamp to mail it. I thought she would faint, then she gave me the strangest look, and walked out with the letter (and three stamps). When the judge called me to follow up I arranged a meeting for the three of us to discuss it. When I told her of the meeting she probably thought she would be in trouble for the things she said about me in the letter. When the meeting began we both complimented



Nancy on her ability to express herself. We said we were happy we were both considered such important people in her life. We agreed if she was that unhappy we would arrange for her to have a second meeting with her social worker, Child and Youth Care worker, and her parents to review the placement decision and look at how we could help her better. The look on her face was precious: "Money in the Bank"!

Avoid the "compliance trap"

When facilitating a training with Child and Youth Care staff who work in "shift" settings I can often get large smiles when mentioning those end of shift program logs that say "Good shift, no problems". I usually suggest that it probably meant "Good shift, I wasn't looking closely". Just the nature of bringing together sometimes as many as twenty youth working through daily issues in the same space for eight hours suggests the road will not be that smooth. In far too many cases the Child and Youth Care worker starts to judge his or her own abilities and competence by "how well the kids behave".

This is often compounded by point systems, supervisor or agency philosophies that subtly (or not so subtly) have a primary focus of rewarding workers and

youth for how compliant the youth are in regard to program rules, adult directions, etc. Of course, there has to be safety in the life-space for youth and Child and Youth Care workers. A certain level of order is necessary for the program to function consistently, but sliding into an over-focus on compliance can be all too seductive as a way to judge success for the worker or for growth in a child. I have always loved Lorraine Fox's (1994) position that sees compliance as a potential catastrophe in providing quality treatment for youth. She points out that the willingness to comply for many youth who have been sexually abused, follow negative peers, etc. it was their inability not to comply that brought them into a situation where they were needing care. There was a girl who I worked with as Director of a residential unit named Maria. She was a girl who was sometimes significantly depressed, had

self-destructive tendencies, and most often took out her anger on herself and not outwardly on others. She was a very popular girl with all in the program as she was extremely polite and "compliant" with most rules. She graduated high school

with us, went to university, and kept in touch. She has an excellent job now and recently invited me to dinner to meet her husband and two teenaged children in a



restaurant in Spanish Harlem in New York City. Of course, we were reminiscing and telling stories at dinner. When it was my turn I told a story that surprised her. After sharing with her children what a polite and sensitive person their Mom was as a teenager, I said I did remember a time when she cursed in my office. Maria looked surprised, perhaps a bit annoyed, and said she did not remember it. I assured her kids she did not do this much and it was the only time I ever heard her curse out loud. The kids looked at each other and said playfully “You should hear her now!” I told them Mom came in my office where her social worker and a Child and Youth Care worker were also present about two months before she was leaving after three years in the program. She blurted out how angry she was with something we had decided, hurled a few classic curse words into the air, and stormed out. I asked Maria if she knew what we did when she left the office. She said “You must have been disappointed”. I laughed and said “Not at all, we clapped for you”. She looked puzzled and asked why. I explained that we all appreciated her being well behaved so often, but real growth for her was to stop taking her anger out inwardly on herself and let it out more ... and she had just done that in grand fashion! She started to tear-up a little and said “You all really did understand me”.

Welcome them “home” and remember the importance of “meaning making”

We would probably all agree that it is crucial to make a child entering a program on the first day to feel welcomed, that

they will be safe there, that we will care for them, and we would hopefully be able to make it as much a home-like atmosphere as possible. A big smile came to my face when I first read Kiaras Gharabaghi’s (2010) wonderfully provocative article “Three Profoundly Stupid Ideas”. In the article Kiaras points out some of the many things we, as Child and Youth Care practitioners and agencies, continue to buy into, and sometimes can even see as normal, when if we took a small step back we could easily see how illogical they are in helping youth grow healthily and improve their self-esteem. The article put words and a framework to something I always realized in my career although I was not always fully innocent of such profoundly stupid things myself. I was not always able to avoid them in my direct interactions with kids or change them in a program (even as a senior manager) because of how ingrained they can become in every-day life for us and children. Putting significant “money in the bank” with kids entails being aware when these profoundly stupid things are happening, acknowledging them, and working to change them. One primary example would be how often a child is not treated anything like being “welcomed home” when returning from a run-away event or AWOL (the term makes me cringe every time it is used, it is not a military setting!). Many times when a youth leaves the program they are hurting or angry, they put themselves in a situation that may be unsafe for an extended period. They ultimately make a good decision to return to the safety of the program. Far



too often they are greeted with a scowling worker who expresses disappointment they left and did not try to work the issue out in the program. They are then handed a consequence for their “bad behavior”. I have always felt a “profoundly brilliant idea” would be to throw them, and the entire living unit, a party when they return; complete with ice cream and cake. This would be a “welcome home” message that would say we are glad you made a good decision, you are safe, and now we will do what we are paid for (and hopefully came into the field for) and try to help you work through the issues that got you to the point of leaving. Consequences are very deeply ingrained in many programs so I was never able to produce the actual party even as a Director in a program with generally excellent and forward thinking workers. However, I did produce a unique approach for our agency that opened up the bank for much larger “deposits”. We added a rule that if a girl wrote a letter before she went AWOL she would get only half the normal consequence on return. If she called us while she was away to tell us she was safe another 50% consequence reduction was put in place. It took a lot to convince the skeptical staff this was a good idea. Although I couldn’t move them away from all consequences we did agree there should be a special relational focus to make the girl as welcomed and nurtured as possible upon return. This was not so hard because for most of them it was their instinctive approach to the work, separate from these profoundly stupid ideas we get trapped in. The skeptics got

an early boost as some of the first letters said things like “Dear Frank. I am going AWOL. I am tired of this place. I am going home and will probably hang out with my friends for a day or two. I’ll return on Sunday, or maybe Monday if I am having a good time. Oh, and don’t forget Frank, half my consequence for this note”. I just gritted my teeth, took a deep breath, and honored our commitment to her! As pointed out earlier in this article putting “money in the bank” entails believing in kids. Over time, when the girls realized the caring here was legitimate many of the letters started to be very different. Some of them read:

“I am going AWOL because that worker got me so angry I would have punched them so hard in the face if they kept badgering me. I am on probation and I might go to jail if I did that. I want to control my temper better but can’t.”

“I left because my uncle is getting out of prison this week. My aunt and mother are very frightened because he would hit my aunt and sometimes hurt the kids. I had a good relationship with him so I think I can talk to him to help my mother and aunt.”

“I am going AWOL because you people are stupid. I need to go into a drug re-hab program and my social worker doesn’t believe me. I am going to try to get my mother to take me for an evaluation herself.”

Do any of the above three examples sound like it was poor decision-making or “bad behavior” that should be given a consequence?? The amount of information to enhance our work with these girls after this was exponential. More importantly the girls across the unit were getting a sense they were really being “heard” when they were upset. Krueger (1998) points out the importance for us to consider “meaning making” of our work. Garfat and Fulcher (2011) framed the practice of meaning making as one of the 25 foundational elements of a Child and Youth Care approach. In the case of our journey of viewing the response to AWOL’s in our program as a way to capitalize on putting as much “money in the bank” as possible with the girls we had to self-reflect, with “meaning making”, very carefully about our responses to the girls for this behavior. We had to minimize our interpretation of it being “acting out” and conceptualize it as a possible good decision in tough circumstances as well as an opportunity to make a relational deposit.

Engage, Collaborate and Nurture after Crisis

When one considers the life experiences so many of the children we work with have had before coming into our programs we can only imagine how much rejection they have experienced. I have often said that if we do nothing else in our work (though hoping we do much more), we should not reject a child or express disappointment in them after an event

where they have displayed very challenging behavior. That is what so many others have done in similar circumstances, so what a golden opportunity it might be to put “money in the bank” by nurturing them after a crisis incident.



I spent much of my career trying to avoid performing physical restraints of children myself. I also highly prioritized restraint reduction/elimination in programs I directed, as well as advocating for restraint reductions while serving on the national Residential Advisory Board of Child Welfare League of America. However, there were sometimes other realities to our work very early in my career and on some occasions I found myself in a position to try my best to enact a safe restraint of a child. I believe strongly that physical restraints, no matter how much we try to justify them, have the impact of placing major unproductive “withdrawals” on our money in the bank with a child. I also have a strong belief, and have commented in a previous article, (Delano, 2000) that a restraint of a child can never be considered best practice. It should not be considered a “last resort therapeutic

intervention” but rather a “therapeutic failure”. It does not necessarily mean the worker “failed”, but that the after-restraint focus should be to assess whether the program doesn’t have enough resources to care for children without restraining, and if they are using the ones they have wisely. One strategy after any crisis is to use Redl and Wineman’s Life Space Interview (1959). In the part where the worker is exploring the child’s perception of reality in the incident I always added a modification where I would gently interrupt the child and say “We have talked about your behavior a lot. Let’s talk about mine in this incident. What could I have done better?” In my years as a direct service Child and Youth Care worker in a cottage there was a boy named Robert. For whatever it is worth Robert’s IQ was in the mid 60’s. He was a very chubby boy, had very low esteem, and often had mucus running from his nose. He was very clingy and generally pleasant to adults but when he ‘lost it’ he had very little ability to “talk it out”. Hence, Robert had to be restrained a number of times. He was large and round so they were difficult restraints to do alone (and yes, that was the norm back then). My co-worker was the cottage manager Miss Rose. She was a strict, but nurturing, woman who lived in an apartment in the same building with the kids. She would come to work in heels and a dress most days. The kids highly respected her and saw her as a mother figure, and she was not doing any restraints. So I, the athletic, younger one, had that “honor”. I would often end up bruised after one with

Robert. Each time I restrained Robert he was very sad afterwards. Miss Rose would leave me with the rest of the kids after the incident and take Robert out for a hamburger. I respected her skills and knowledge, but I was the one that was bruised! This went on a couple of times and when I finally expressed my concerns with this she brushed it off saying “He must be fed”. After one or two more restraints I raised it in supervision with the Director and he said he would handle it. After two more restraints for Frank, and then hamburgers for Robert and Miss Rose, I went back to him to see what happened in his discussion with her. He said “I tried to talk with her but she just looked at me and said he must be fed! She is too valuable for me to mess with on this so I left it alone”. Unrelated to this, both Miss Rose and I moved on the other programs a few months later. Robert went home to live with his family. At a campus graduation ceremony three years later he returned to campus to visit. He was much slimmer with smart suit on, had a big smile on his face, and even had a job running messages up and down stairs in a company near his home. Just when I was savoring this, Miss Rose walked over, elbowed me gently in the ribs, and said “He must be fed!” At that point the art of our work hit me and what Miss Rose was doing magically made so much sense. I am not sure if research would bear it out but the art of our work told me while she never articulated it, the hamburgers were Robert’s “life space interview”. He would be very sad and had so little capacity to talk the issues through

after the restraint it would have been very hard to nurture and reassure him with words. But, what better way to nurture a child such as Robert to show him you still care than to feed him? It was such a brilliant use of “money in the bank” I overcame my nagging feeling that maybe I should have been the one to get those hamburgers and not Miss Rose! I didn’t do any more restraints in my career as my relationship-building skills grew after that period. However, after any crisis where a child was angry or verbally aggressive towards me I made sure to take him or her out afterwards to shoot baskets, sit down and eat together, or give other “I want to be with you” messages to put that money in the bank.

Love the Unlovable

I have always felt positively about the Reclaiming Youth concept of the importance of “loving the unlovable”. Of course Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (1992) were not implying there are kids who are literally unlovable, but rather stressing the importance of reaching out to and accepting the most difficult and challenging kids to be around. James Freeman (2014) points out that very often the youth who are the most difficult to connect with need human connections the most. In a recent article in Child and Youth Care-Net I told the story of a girl named Christine who was a student worker in our recreation office. In an upsetting phone call with her mother she ripped my phone out of the wall and threw it across



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the room in my direction (Delano, 2105). She was certainly not at her “lovable best” at that moment and stormed out of the office cursing. It was a golden “money in the bank” opportunity at that point. I will never forget the look on her face the next day when I told her she was not fired from her job, she was a very valuable worker, and speaking as her boss, she better get to work quickly! The position of Recreation Director in a residential program for over 140 youth gave multiple opportunities to make significant “money in the bank” deposits. Even when kids are in their most “unlovable” moments making them feel, and actually be, wanted and useful deposits fortunes of money. Perhaps the most memorable example revolved around a girl named Becky. I was new to the recreation position after 5 years as a direct service Child and Youth Care worker in the living units. I was building the program and wanted to make as many connections as possible with kids I did not know yet to engage them in the central recreation program. One afternoon I had some filing and decorating work to be done and called the Guidance Counselor of the on-campus school to ask if there was a student free who could do some work for me. She would be paid (literally) the grand sum of \$1 per hour. When he answered I could barely hear him as there was a lot of banging and a girl screaming in the background. I asked to have a girl come down to work and he said “I can’t help now, it is wild up here”. Undeterred, I said “Who is that in the background screaming”? He told me it was a new girl Becky who was very agi-

tated (obviously) and had created all sorts of mayhem in the school her first few days there. I said “Well, when she is finished screaming send her down to work”. He said “Are you crazy?” I said. “Well, I need the work done and it will get her out of your hair today. It is calm and quiet here with no stimulation so maybe it will help her settle in”. What a gold mine developed in so many ways! Fifteen minutes later this angry looking girl came in steaming “Who are you and what do you want?” I told her who I was and there was work to be done at \$1 per hour. She gave me the strangest look. When she realized I wasn’t kidding she got silent and told me she wasn’t always this wild but it was so hard for her being at the center. She then told me a key name to address her when she was getting upset because that is what her parents did and it sometimes worked. She agreed to get to work and she ultimately became a valued student worker in my program for three years. She was respected by all for her work and in many ways became the representative face of the recreation department. Of course, she still had “her moments” in the larger program, but not at work. I had to withstand the pressure I received from many about “rewarding her bad behavior” that day. But, it was “money in the bank” that never left her and, by the way, the girl with the momentary “unlovable” behavior became quite easy for both adults and her peers to love for the way she carried herself in that program.

Making the effort to put “money in the bank” with the “unlovable” has the direct

effect of helping that child feel you care, you still like them, and you accept them. Even better is when you reach out to those kids that Freeman suggests are the hardest to connect with every other kid in the program sees that gesture. You are also putting “money in the bank” with them as the belief that you will also be there for them in their rough moments is planted.

“They better want to come to see YOUR ditches”

Basketball great Bill Russell grew up in an awful racially segregated era in Louisiana. He was a very smart youngster, a good student and a terrific athlete. However, opportunities for Black youth in that era were extremely limited. Reflecting on reasons for his unparalleled success and level of excellence in his career he recalls one day his father took him aside and said “William, I don’t know what you will be when you grow up. You might be a teacher, you might stock shelves in a supermarket, you could be a professional athlete, perhaps a doctor, or you might end up digging ditches for a living. Now, if you do end up digging ditches son, there better damn well be people coming down here to Louisiana from New York, Chicago, Detroit and all over to see YOUR ditches. You have to have pride and strive for excellence in whatever you do to be a respected person and to respect yourself”. A number of years back I was trying to come up with a working definition of Child and Youth

Care work for our agency. I came up with this:

We must always respect “science”. But, we must remember that while science is important and should serve as a backdrop, working with children is primarily an “art”. It is foundationally about healthy adult-child relationships, feeling and reading the moment, sound judgment, and that truly artistic thing called “genuine caring” ... it is about putting “Money in the Bank” with a child.

Whenever I facilitate a training now I let the class know that I hope they leave with a lot of knowledge. However, I say my primary wish is they leave with many more questions than answers: questions that reflect on themselves and their practice, questions that explore new ideas they heard in the training, questions that challenge themselves to look for ways to be even more excellent, etc.

So, I close this article with a few questions for the reader: How would you describe your “art” of working with children? What are the ways you are putting “money in the bank” with children now? What can you do to help those “deposits” grow? Ask yourself what makes you a “\$7 for \$5 worker”? Most importantly, although Child and Youth Care work is far more impactful to others than digging ditches, why would I, or any Child and Youth Care peers you respect, want to come and see your proverbial “ditches”? That is, why would we want to come to admire YOUR “art of working with children”? It is the pride in our effort and the beauty of our relational art that best puts



that precious “money in the bank” with children...and the opportunity to build relationship connections with children is a precious thing we all should be honored with and savor.

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