



#202(B) – 6715-76 Ave / Edmonton, Alberta / T6B 0A9 / 902-899-7917

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This past weekend an attack was committed against a child and youth care counsellor (CYCC) at the Elk Island Ranch. Details are limited yet we know the woman was working alone (found 2 hours after the assault), her injuries were severe enough that she was flown by Stars Air Ambulance to Edmonton, and the attackers were allegedly two male youth in the care of the ranch.

Our thoughts are with the CYCC, her family, the youth, and their families following this incident. CYCC's know that violence is a potential of our work. We work with individuals and families who have been hurt, and who struggle to engage in relationships with individuals, communities, and systems. The emotional responses of the people we work with are often incongruent with what might be expected from typical individuals confronted with caring and challenge. We know that these atypical responses may be aggressive, flight or fight behaviours, indicative of the trauma they experienced as children. However that cannot ever make us complacent about being confronted with the reality of that fight response or lacking in a compassionate response to both the youngsters and CYC practitioners involved.

The Child & Youth Care Association of Alberta (CYCAA) aims to improve professional standards for all CYCC's with the intention of ensuring the best quality services for the individuals we assist. While assaults of this intensity are rare, we saw a vicious assault on a CYC practicum student in Manitoba last spring and less serious assaults are common. Many CYC counsellors have a related diploma or degree and more and more have degrees or diplomas from CYC educational programs across Canada. In AB, the CYCAA developed and has administered a non-mandatory certification program since 1979. The certified CYCC demonstrates an expansive knowledge in a variety of theoretical and practice frameworks.

A report on residential care services (Because Young People Matter, February 2016) commissioned by the government of Ontario contains recommendations that can be applied as a platform for change well outside of Ontario.

The Panel is concerned that ever-increasing demands related to the claim of greater complexity of child and youth profiles in residential services, the evidence-based interventions required, and the challenges associated with navigating systems both within larger organizations and between service providers embedded in different sectors are incongruent with the current lack of regulation in terms of pre-service

educational qualifications for residential staff. The evolving context of residential care service provision in all sectors demands more highly qualified staff with an in-depth understanding of the fundamental models, approaches, theories, children's rights, cultural and system contexts of residential service provision

.... The Panel firmly believes that all individuals charged with the care of children and youth in residential services must hold specific and consistent pre-service educational qualifications, preferably in the field of child and youth care, and be supported through comprehensive in-service training. (p. 10).

We believe this evolving complexity applies across the gamut of services child and youth care counsellors provide and there are several changes we recommend to try to increase the safety of the children, youth and families we work with and the CYCCs providing the care. Paramount is the review of any programs using a single staffing model. This decision is frequently based on a lack of funding; not care and safety of young people and staff. This is simply not fair to the youth in the care of the province or the CYCC's tasked with their care. Another is that CYCC's be legislated under the Health Professions Act so that that all people working with vulnerable children, youth and families are held to the professional standards of a legislated profession.

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