

# Philosophy of CYC Practice

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I grew up with two siblings and many cousins in my neighbourhood in Sri Lanka. I saw and played with them daily, so I experienced the value of family and community from a young age. My grandma always said, “Children are the life of a society.” My family moved to England when I was seven. Most of my mother’s siblings live in England, so I still had some cousins, but they were a lot younger. This is when I really found enjoyment in helping children younger than me. When I was 12, my family moved to Canada, but this transition was a lot easier because I had learned how to make new friends and understood the language. Children at school were more open to me and kind, but I saw how they were hesitant with other new students who didn’t speak fluent English like me. It broke my heart because I saw the sadness in their eyes when they were left out or picked last. I was privileged to grow up in England because this could have easily been me. So, from then on, I took it upon myself to befriend every new student. A few months after moving to Canada, my mother moved for work and for the first time, I felt the impact of a broken family. Unlike many other families, it was not a chaotic or messy situation but painful nonetheless.

In middle school, I was in friend groups which most teachers told me were not good for me, but in some way, these students understood my pain. We did not have the same situations, but we were children in pain. Being in the CYC program, I often wonder if my teachers could have supported us in some way or referred us to something, rather than group my friends into what they called “bad kids.” A year later, I went through a health issue and spent about two months in the hospital. I was terrified but felt genuinely cared for by my nurses. Coming out of that season of life, I knew I wanted to be someone who made every child feel seen, heard, and cared for. I volunteered for a summer camp that year for children in grades 6-12 and I absolutely loved it. Working with children, helping, and building relationships with them lit a fire inside of me. To this day, I still volunteer for this summer camp every year and watching these children grow has been one of the most beautiful experiences.

In high school, I had peers who were in and out of juvie, and I witnessed how they were treated as failures and “bad kids” by parents, teachers, peers, and society once they returned. There was a lot of crime in the neighbourhood that I grew up in, and it was a highly immigrant community, so good grades and education were a top priority. One can imagine what it’s like when one of these children makes a poor choice. Looking back, I realize how influential we are during the teenage years and how easy it is to get into the wrong things. Somehow it was always easy for me to talk to peers who had been to juvie, and we had some of the best laughs of my life. I believe there’s beauty in a bond where you know someone, then watch them make terrible mistakes and go through the consequences, but still treat them with love and kindness. I had this burden of not being able to help them and felt the pain of them having no one believe in or support them. Unfortunately, most of them dropped out of school or ended up in juvie. However, I knew then, I wanted to make a difference in this community one day.

After high school, I decided to do Health Science at university to understand the overall impact of health and see what opportunities it would open for me. I enjoyed it, and it has given me a wide variety of knowledge, especially on the history, trauma and struggles of Indigenous peoples, children with intellectual disabilities and mental and physical health. This has blessed me so much in the CYC program by giving me a new perspective on helping children and youth. I really wanted something that had a personal relationship aspect, but I did not find it in any Health Science careers. I had a friend looking into Loyalist College, so I browsed through the programs. For the first time, I read about Child and Youth Care, and I instantly knew it was for me. A program that would teach me the skills to impact children and youth in a healthy, positive way, I was sold!

All of my life experiences have given me the desire to be a CYC to help children and youth lead a better life. I hope to make a positive impact in the lives of children and youth I work with, but also in the ones that I do life with. The sad reality is that many children and youth do not have someone who is for them or there for them, and I hope to be that person, in a healthy way. I love that this field promotes relationships, families, and communities. It prioritizes the individual rather than known services or skills and encourages them to make decisions that impact their lives, instead of making it for them. I hope to be an advocate for those I work with and provide them with the skills they need to make their own choices and be successful in what they do. I was privileged to have one parent who was always present, loving, and supportive and my goal is to create safe environments and build healthy relationships to be that for young people. By being genuine in my work, aware of my biases and creating healthy boundaries, while listening, trying to understand and being there for the individuals I work with, I know I can make a lasting, positive impact in their daily lives. Growing up in a diverse neighbourhood, I have learned much about various cultures and religions and what safety means to different individuals. I am determined to continuously educate myself on these topics because without safety, there is no relationship, and without a relationship, I am just another adult in their life. I am eager and excited to learn more about being a successful and competent CYC and putting it into practice in my practicums.