

a eu un large consensus sur ce dont a besoin le domaine de la santé mentale des enfants et des jeunes... MAINTENANT! La nécessité de collaborer au sein du domaine de la santé mentale des enfants et des jeunes, de même qu'à travers tous les secteurs est très évidente. LE STATU QUO N'EST TOUT SIMPLEMENT PAS UNE OPTION!

En outre, le raz de marée d'optimisme, d'espoir, d'énergie, d'innovation et de passion produit par l'émergence de la Commission de la santé mentale du Canada est d'une grande importance. Bon nombre de personnes ont manifesté un grand intérêt à contribuer directement à la Commission mais, dans le cadre de son mandat, elle ne peut qu'en impliquer directement quelques-uns. Il est absolument essentiel de mobiliser l'optimisme, l'enthousiasme, la passion et l'innovation de tous ceux qui ont

exprimé de l'intérêt. Le temps est peut-être venu de créer un mouvement sur la santé mentale des enfants et des jeunes axé sur tous les objectifs décrits ci-dessus. De toute évidence, il existe une nécessité de collaboration et d'assistance renforcées et mutuelles entre la comité consultatif sur les enfants et les jeunes de la Commission, le mouvement émergent et les différents organes nationaux sur la santé mentale des enfants et des jeunes, comme le National Infant, Child and Youth Mental Health Consortium.

Le comité consultatif de la Commission renforce cette opportunité.

L'espoir pour l'avenir DOIT devenir la réalité du présent!

- 1 Romanow, Roy. Commission sur l'avenir des soins de santé au Canada. *Rapport final : Guidé par nos valeurs : L'avenir des soins de santé au Canada*. « On a souvent décrit la

santé mentale comme l'orphelin du réseau des soins de santé ». Pxxxi. Novembre 2002

- 2 Offord, D.R., Boyle, M.H., Szatmari, P. et al. (1987). Ontario Child Health Study II. Six-month prevalence of disorder and rates of service utilization. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 44, 832-836.
- 3 Waddell, C., Offord, D. R., Shepherd, C. A., Hua, J. M., & McEwan, K. (2002). Child Psychiatric Epidemiology and Canadian Public Policy-making: The State of the Science and the Art of the Possible. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 47, 825-832.

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The essentials of an action plan to promote child and youth mental health

Natacha Joubert

The following is a presentation given at the *National Invitational Symposium on Child and Youth Mental Health*.

Good morning. Addressing the development of an action plan for child and youth mental health in 10 minutes is quite a challenge. So, I decided to share with you what I think are essential elements to consider as we move forward.

In my view, the first and most important element we need is a clear vision and understanding of what we want to do to promote the mental health of children and youth or what we want to achieve with the action plan. In so many ways, our gathering at this two-day Sympo-

sium speaks to it. As parents, educators, service providers, researchers and decision-makers, we care about children and youth and we want to offer them what they need to be mentally healthy and to develop to their full potential.

So we spend a lot of time and energy to identify what appears to us as being their most significant mental health needs. And what we see as being their most significant needs are based on the way we see and describe their reality and life issues, which is very much based on the way we see and describe our own reality, which in turn reflects the way we see and describe ourselves as people, as human beings.

So I ask the question: how do we see ourselves and our reality? How do we describe "who we are" and the world around us? Would you say that we see ourselves mainly as resourceful, insightful and responsible individuals or more as flawed and alienated victims? Are we focussing on our health, resilience, wisdom, creativity, courage, generosity and determination or are we more upset and obsessed with our limitations, weaknesses, problems, diseases and lack of control? And how do we see the world around us? How do we describe it? Do we see it as a source of infinite possibilities to express and experience our resourcefulness or do we see it more as an unpredictable and dangerous place?

These are important questions because the way we see ourselves, the world and our reality impact directly on the way we see our children and youth and the way we address their reality and life issues. How do we see children and youth? How do we describe them? Do we recognize, value and support their resourcefulness, kindness, creativity, courage and determination or do we worry about their behavioural and emotional problems, their deficiencies and disabilities?



I think children and youth are, in so many ways, reflecting back to us our ways of being and relating. The mental health and well-being of our children and youth are a strong indicator of how we are doing individually and collectively. When the number of children and youth facing social and mental health problems increases, it means that we, as individuals, community and society, need to review and change some of our perceptions of ourselves and reality.

As much as we want all children and youth to be healthy and totally fulfilled, we keep giving most of our attention to their problems and deficiencies. Why is that? Looking more closely at how we go about organizing and understanding our reality, which is called the dominant paradigm, can actually provide some answers.

We live in a society that is still dominated by a paradigm of fear. Fears of judgment and exclusion, of sickness

and death, of violence and repression, among others, shape our ways of being and relating to the world. Throughout history, fear has been used by authorities to establish their power over the rest of the people.

To date, it still receives its legitimacy from many of our institutions, organizations and the media. However, we can see everywhere more clearly than ever how the insecurity, depression, separation, conflict, misery


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and despair created by fear cause immense suffering and ultimately imprison and impoverish everybody. There is no more benefit to be had from fear. This old paradigm is no longer functional.

So let's move away from it and choose another paradigm, another way of looking at ourselves and addressing our

reality that is more in accordance with "who we really are" and what we want for our children and youth and for ourselves.

Looking at "who we are" and the world around us through the lens of *trust* instead of *fear* can actually change our whole system of thought and reality. When we trust our Self and others, we experience our openness and *connectedness*; we stop being judgmental and feeling *separated* from each other and the universe around us. Once we are reconnected to our Self and others, the feeling of inadequacy or *incompleteness* disappears. We can rediscover and enjoy our *resourcefulness*, individually and collectively. Our various life circumstances become *opportunities* for change and not threatening *problems*. Therefore our actions are intended to *support* our resourcefulness instead of trying to fix or *control* our incompleteness and problems. We hold ourselves accountable and take action on the *causes* of our different life circumstances instead of reacting or losing ourselves in their multiple *effects*. Finally, our vision and actions are integrated into a *continuous* and evolving process, not a *short-term* and fragmented one.

Imagine how different all of our lives and the lives of children and youth would be if our decisions and actions in every aspects of human life were based on trust and meant to empower and support the resourcefulness of individuals and communities.

Yes, there are many children and youth that are facing difficult life situations and problems and yes we absolutely want to do something about it. But we have to be aware that the way we address their problems—often by fearing and fighting what we don't want to see in them—reflects and maintains the way we see and feel about ourselves and the way we go about our lives, individually and collectively. There is a very powerful but yet elementary process in play here:

Moving toward a new paradigm

FEAR—Old paradigm	TRUST—New paradigm
Judgment	Openness
Separation	Connectedness
Incompleteness	Resourcefulness
Problems	Opportunities
Control	Support
Cause-EFFECT	CAUSE-effect
Short-term	Continuity

what we focus on defines our reality. So, focusing mainly on problems keeps us immersed in problems. This is also true of fear, war, injustice, illness, misery, etc. I propose that we make a few adjustments so our legacy to children and youth will represent what we really are outside of fear. We can decide to spend more time and effort trusting and supporting what we want for ourselves and our children and youth and less in fearing and fighting what we don't want. In other words, as we prepare ourselves for developing an action plan for children and youth, let's focus more on their resourcefulness and ability to be mentally healthy.

Whatever situations they are facing or conditions they are experiencing, children and youth are much more open and responsive to an approach that recognizes and increases their health and resourcefulness than to ones that victimize and reduce them to their deficiencies and disabilities. Increasing and acknowledging health and resourcefulness is what promoting mental health is all about.

Promoting the mental health of children and youth can be defined as

- 1) fostering the development of their mental health, resourcefulness and well-being; and
- 2) creating supportive and resourcing environments. The good news is we are already doing it in so many ways. The wisdom and practices that are required to reinforce and maintain the mental health of children and

youth can be found in most families and communities. But they need to be recognized and better supported by the families and the communities themselves and the various authorities (i.e. political, financial, academic, health and social organizations, etc.). And this recognition and support is the second very important element that we have to consider in developing and action plan to promote the mental health of children and youth.

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The role of experts like you all is crucial in that regard. The federal, provincial/territorial and municipal governments give a lot of credit to the assessments and recommendations of experts when it comes to the development of mental health programs and policy. Therefore, mental health experts have an opportunity to ensure that the essential contribution of children and youth and their parents

and communities to the development of an action plan is fully validated and engaged. Citizen or community engagement is not only a value or a principle. It is a necessity. Top-down processes never produce either a clear vision of what is needed or long-term and sustainable results, and we know it.

To be significant, firmly embedded and effective, an action plan for child and youth mental health has to be based on the resourcefulness of children and youth, their parents and communities. Governments come and go but the community remains! Human and financial resources or any other support provided by government or other external sources should supplement, not replace, individual and community resourcefulness. Real and sustainable transformation always comes from inside individuals and communities. But it can be facilitated and nurtured. And this is where you and I and so many others can make a huge difference.

Our children and youth need to see and feel that we believe in their resourcefulness as well as in their desire and capacity to be, to belong and to become. They are our best reference to who we really are when we are out of fear: trusting, joyful, resourceful and hopeful.

Thank you!

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