Discovering Camphill: A Personal Narrative

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Abstract

Recently the author was invited to visit Camphill School, Aberdeen, to reflect on his experience of the Camphill programme in light of contemporary thinking about 'best environments' for young people with serious learning disabilities. At the end of his experience of 'discovering Camphill' for himself, the author was invited to share his experiences with the participants invited to a one-day conference organised by the school in Aberdeen. This paper is a representation of what the author had to say as he reflected on his personal experience of 'discovering Camphill'.

Keywords

Camphill, residential child care

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Introduction

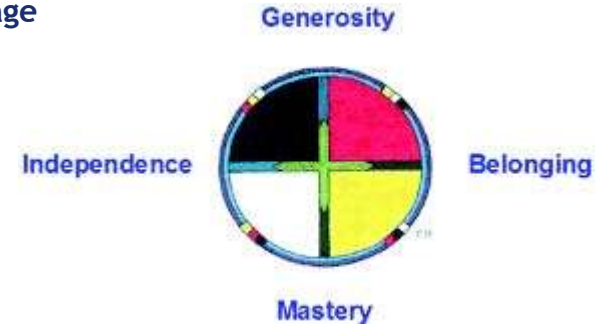
Camphill communities have been in existence for some 70 years (Jackson, 2011) and yet they are new to me. I am 64 years old and am only now 'discovering Camphill'. One has to wonder, is that because of the myths of isolation (Costa, 2011) which have surrounded Camphill? Or is it, as others have suggested, because the staff and management of Camphill communities have chosen to stay somewhat removed from the communities that surround them? Or is it, perhaps, a product of my (of our) reluctance to explore things unknown to us? When I was young, if there were groups of people who we saw as different than ourselves, we did not explore and discover who they were. Rather we cast them in the role of 'other' and built walls to separate us. Regardless of the reason, this was the time of my discovering. I was invited to spend a few days at Camphill School in Aberdeen and then to reflect on my experience of Camphill for the participants of a conference organised to help begin the process of 'opening up' Camphill to the larger community. The Camphill communities recognise, as do all programmes now, that in order to continue, one must become a part of the larger network of services.

A shift from behaviour to needs

One of the most important shifts which has occurred in our thinking about helping and healing is the shift from simply reacting to behaviour to responding to needs. Whatever the behaviour that may be presented by an individual we have become, as a society, more

focused on meeting the needs of the individual rather than, as we have been historically, simply focused on dealing with the behaviour of the individual. Perhaps the most contemporary model for looking at the needs of individuals is the Circle of Courage which identifies four needs for positive growth and development (Brendtro, Brokenleg & van Bockern, 1990). So, in discovering Camphill, I have chosen to use this framework, which is a modern, progressive, positive, strength-based orientation, to reflect on my experience.

The Circle of Courage



Circle of Courage TM (Brendtro et al., 1990)

Articulated by Brendtro et al. (1990) the Circle of Courage arose from their work with the Lakota people of South Dakota, USA. The Circle of Courage is addressed to four basic human needs (Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity) which, when met, become strengths. All parts of the circle must be in balance if a person is to live in harmony. Research in the areas of resilience, self-worth, and neuroscience confirm the universality of these four needs. Practice experience has shown that this framework, and this focus on these four basic needs, transcends people, places and cultures. What follows is a brief explanation of the four needs for positive human growth and development identified in the Circle of Courage model.

Belonging: We all need to belong. To connect and belong is, after all, the most basic of human survival needs. In belonging, we find ourselves to be of value. In the deepest sense of belonging, we are all related and all part of the community of humankind. In belonging, we are able to say 'I have a place, I am of worth and I am appreciated'. Belonging is not limited to one place or one group of people. We can belong with our family, with our home, with our church group, with our clan, with our community. Belonging in one place is not a threat to belonging in others.

Mastery: We all have a need to feel competent, to do better, or to have some sense of mastery over our life and environments. Mastery is not just about skills such as adding numbers or wielding a hammer; it is also about being able to face the challenges that life offers you. True mastery is also about knowing that you can face those challenges. Through developing an experience of mastery, a person develops the sense that 'I can do it!' True mastery compares your achievements not to those of others, but to yourself. When a person starts to experience competence in their life, they are motivated to make further achievements. Deprived of opportunities for success, people express their frustrations through troubled behaviour or by retreating in helplessness and inferiority (Brendtro and Longhurst, 2005).

Independence: Independence does not mean one is disconnected from others. Indeed most truly independent people are deeply connected in relationships of belonging, for it is from the strength of these connections that the individual is able to stand up for what they believe in, to exert influence over the direction of their own lives and gain a sense that 'I am in charge' to whatever degree that is possible given the limitations of their life. We create opportunities for people to develop a sense of power by involving them in decisions about their lives. We assist them to discover the resources and tools within them and around them.

Generosity: Human beings need to give, and be the recipients of generosity, the giving to others with no expectation of anything in return. As Martin Brokenleg (1999) has said 'When real generosity occurs, the recipient feels nurtured and healing begins. In the process of reciprocal generosity, the community reaches out to those in need; the person befriended responds with generosity as well (p 195). When people experience generosity towards themselves they feel of worth, and when they are generous towards others they experience the value of their lives. So, this is the framework I used in my experience of 'Discovering Camphill'. Essentially, I asked the question:

> Does Camphill nurture and meet the individuals' needs for Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity?

I had another question when I was reflecting on the school, however, and that had to do with how co-workers interact with the young people in addressing these needs.

Characteristics associated with a contemporary child and youth care approach

If the *Circle of Courage* guides us in how we might focus if we are wanting to be a healing programme, the characteristics of a Child and Youth Care approach (Garfat and Fulcher, 2011) might guide us in thinking about how we might meet these needs – what we might do – or how we might be - that will be helpful or healing and, in essence, contribute to meeting these four universal growth needs.

Child and Youth Care (CYC) began in institutions and residential programmes as a way of working with children and young people and with time has developed into an approach to working with people regardless of settings or labels. Thus we find Child and Youth Care professionals working in group living environments, in schools, hospitals and communities with young people and families and older persons. It is a way of being with people in a healing and helping manner which has a focus on relationships as opposed to the historical control and authoritarian approaches which have been so common in so many settings (Garfat and Fulcher, 2011).

Child and Youth Care practice is based on helping people live their life differently *as they are living it* (Garfat, 2002). It is immediate and focuses on the moment as it is occurring (Fulcher and Garfat, 2008). It allows for the individual to learn and practise new thoughts, feelings and actions in the most important area of their lives - daily life as they are living it. Recently, Leon Fulcher and I reviewed the literature of the Child and Youth Care field and identified some 25 characteristics of this approach (Garfat and Fulcher, 2011).

They are identified in the table below.

25 characteristics associated with contemporary CYC practice.	
Participating with people as they live their lives	Working in the now
Meeting 'em where they're at	Flexibility and individuality
Doing 'with'	Meaning-making
Connection and engagement	Reflection
Being in relationship	Purposeful use of activities
Using daily life events to facilitate change	Family-oriented
Examining context	Being emotionally present
Intentionality	Counseling on the go
Responsive developmental practice	Strength based & resiliency focus
Hanging out	It's All about us
Hanging in	Love
Rhythmicity	

These characteristics are associated with a well-developed contemporary approach to helping people live their lives differently, whatever 'differently' might mean. As much as anything, these characteristics speak to 'how we are being in our doing' when we work with others. It is these characteristics which informed and guided me as I addressed myself to my second question of reflection which was:

> Is the Camphill way of being and doing with others, compatible with a contemporary approach to meeting people's needs?

With these two questions in mind, I engaged in my own process of 'discovering Camphill' based on readings, discussions with 'Camphillers' and 'outsiders', and my own limited experience of spending time on the Camphill School Aberdeen estate. In the following section, using as a base the needs identified by the Circle of Courage, are my reflections on what I have learned during this process. As each need is discussed, I will also identify a few of the evident characteristics of a Child and Youth Care approach which seem particularly relevant. Using the previous table, the reader might reflect on whether or not other characteristics are not also present.

Meeting the Individual's Need for Belonging

One of the most frequently identified characteristics of a Child and Youth Care approach is that of hanging in – staying with people through good times and bad, not rejecting them just because they do not meet our desires or expectations (Garfat, 1999; Shaw, 2006; Somasundram, 2005). One hangs in and works things through, thereby demonstrating commitment and caring. In hanging in we develop 'trust' in the context of relationships. In the absence of that trust, belonging will not develop.

Many of the young people and others who come to Camphill do so after numerous other placements, where people being unable to understand the individual or the meaning of their behaviours have given up and decided that the individual is too much of a problem, too much of a challenge. So they require that person to leave. When one moves from place to place it is impossible to develop a sense of belonging because one cannot trust that they will be staying in relationship. In the absence of continuity of connection, belonging cannot develop meaningfully.

So often in other programmes, in an attempt to rationalise the action of moving a young person away, we resort to platitudes like 'another programme will be better able to meet their needs' but at Camphill I heard instead some questions:

> What do we need to do in order to meet this person's needs?
> How do we need to change in order to be helpful?

Camphill does not blame the person for their behaviour. Rather the staff seem to try to understand it and discover how they might be helpful so that the individual can continue within the Camphill programme. The end result is that the person has the opportunity to connect with others, over a long period of time, becoming a valued member of the community and developing, therefore, the feelings of safety, trust and worthiness which are essential to meeting the need for belonging.

'Being' in relationship is not the same as 'having a relationship'. Everyone has relationships but being in relationship means engaging with the other person in a deep and profound manner which impacts both person and helper (Gannon, 2003). The helper recognises that they live in a relationship with a person where each has contributed to making that relationship what it is (Fewster, 1990). It also means engaging in relationships and being in these relationships over the course of time.

At Camphill people have the opportunity to do that. Too often in our rush to make things better or reduce the costs associated with treatment and healing, we are anxious for 'the client' to make the behavioural changes demanded without taking the time to engage in real, living human relationships. Yet before healing, or education, can begin what is needed is the encounter of a self with another self (König, 2009). This encounter of self with self does not occur quickly, because in order for one's self to be vulnerably available, the individual must experience trust and safety which comes only with time and experience.

At Camphill the individual does not have to leave after a certain period of time, to move on to another programme where they might be again misunderstood. If they do need to move on then usually they can do so within the context of a Camphill programme where the same understanding, the same philosophy, prevails. This promotes a feeling of 'I belong' and with that comes the thought that 'I am of value because someone cares about me'.

Camphill offers a full 'community of belonging' where all people are free to participate without stigma or rejection and where, therefore, people can have a constant, not occasional, experience of 'I belong'. Too often, when people with special needs live in the wider community, they have only limited experiences of belonging because of the frequently overt, or subtle, rejection by members of that wider community who do not live the same philosophy of acceptance which one experiences at Camphill.

Meeting the Individual's Need for Mastery

Mastery involves not only being able to do something, but also knowing you are able to do it. Mastery does not involve comparing yourself to others, but to yourself, your progress measured only against you. As Brokenleg (1999) said, you do not compete against others, you compete with them.

How does one develop mastery? We develop mastery through understanding and doing. Understanding helps with the doing, and doing helps with the understanding. In programmes, therefore, which want to help people develop a sense of mastery, there needs to be an emphasis on doing – and not just 'any doing' but meaningful doing.

Learning (developing mastery) is what the brain does best. It is what it is designed to do. In too many programmes the individuals who are supposedly 'served' by the programme spend hours, and even days, literally 'doing nothing'. They sit and watch the television, or sometimes play on the computer but, otherwise, they spend little time engaged in meaningful activities of learning.

At Camphill, it seems, people are busy doing all the time and in this doing, there is the opportunity for learning. As people go through the days doing things with the co-workers, they have the opportunity to learn new things, or new skills when and where they are needed; not only in a structured programme of instruction but in everyday life events. For example, as we cook together I might learn so many things – from what is nutritious, to how to be safe in handling potentially dangerous instruments like knives, to how different people have different tastes, to how to be engaging, to how to be sanitary, to how to converse and so on. When we garden together, the same opportunities arise. This is learning through doing in the classroom of life.

Ritual, routine, and structure, participating in the everyday events of living together, these offer the opportunity for a person to learn how to be in the world, while being in the world. Working in the now, in the present moment, offers this opportunity. At Camphill, everyone lives in the 'now', in the daily classroom of life, and it is a full classroom of life, not one limited to the building and a school, but a classroom of life as

full as those of anyone anywhere in the world. This purposeful use of activities, this use of daily life events, create meaningful opportunities to develop a sense of mastery and competence. At Camphill people have the opportunity to meet their need for Mastery in the world in which they live every day.

Meeting the Individual's need for Independence

Independent people, strongly connected in belonging to a group in which they are valued, are able to assert themselves in the world around them. They are able to stand up for what they want or believe in and act in a responsible manner with others they encounter.

We assist people in meeting their need for Independence by ensuring that they might participate in activities and opportunities within which they have the chance to make responsible, important decisions. We do not help people develop independence by doing everything for them, or doing things (e.g., punishment) to them. Rather, people learn to do for themselves when we do things with them in a mutual experience of being connected together in the experience of the moment.

From a place of safe and secure connectedness, what Maier (1987) called 'rootedness', a person is able to take the steps to develop independently much as a child learns to walk. By focusing on people's strengths, by helping them to develop their resilience, we help them be better able to meet the challenges they will face.

One size does not fit all at Camphill, I discovered. Rather, everyone is treated as an individual and when they are treated as an individual their sense of independence is enhanced. Through being connected in relationship, engaged in all aspects of their life, through respecting their humanness, through supporting them to 'take the risk, take a chance, give it a try', one is encouraged to develop as an autonomous individual as much as possible.

A part of the power, I believe, of Camphill, is that the focus is on the person, not their problems or their behaviours (although those are important) but first comes the person. You are who you are and perhaps you have challenges different than mine but you also have strengths and abilities that are different from mine. This focus on the individuality, the humanness, of the person encourages a sense of individuality and appropriate independence.

Brendtro and Longhurst (2005) said that people who lack a sense of control over their life display either learned helplessness or rebellion. At Camphill, people are supported in having as much control as possible over his or her daily life and their destiny. They are encouraged to meet their need for Independence through being themselves living in supportive relationships of connectedness with others in their world.

Meeting the Individual's Need for Generosity

People come to Camphill and dedicate their lives, or a significant part of their life, to meeting the needs of those who live in Camphill. That, in and of itself, is a tremendous act of generosity towards others and when people experience themselves as being the

recipients of a generous act they feel valued and of worth. People who give so generously do so out of a place of caring. When you are the recipient of such caring, you experience it, whether you understand it or not. People who feel they are of worth feel valued and care for those who care for them.

The most powerful act of caring, and therefore one of the most powerful acts of generosity, is, of course, simply being emotionally present. By being with other in, as König (2009) said, the encounter of self with self, one says to the other 'I value you'. And valuing other, with no expectation of return, is one of the greatest acts of generosity.

Generosity, I discovered, is not a one-way street at Camphill. Through daily activities, and through organised acts of giving to other, the individuals in Camphill Aberdeen School also engage in acts of generosity towards others. When people engage in acts of giving to others, like to the community, or elders in the community, or a specific charity, while expecting nothing in return, one receives the greatest gift of all: One becomes a valued member of the community.

Love is a word not discussed much in our field any more, although there was a time when it was common. But perhaps the greatest act of generosity is love; loving another without interfering judgments. Meeting them where they are at, loving them as they are being who they are is a powerful therapeutic force. Costa (2011) in discussing the myths of Camphill said that only through love can freedom be achieved. Somewhat ironically Thumbadoo (2011), writing at approximately the same time, when talking about children in deep rural South Africa, said that caring and love intermingle in the encounters between care workers and children. Love, it seems, is present in our work whether we discuss it or not.

People at Camphill do not always identify it as such but it is there in the acceptance, the acts of caring, the life commitment of so many of the co-workers. When people are surrounded by a context of love, positive interactions between them increase. This context of positive interactions is the foundation for meaningful growth, development and healing for all people regardless of the challenges they face.

Some Concluding Reflections

Does Camphill School in Aberdeen address itself in a meaningful way towards the needs of the individuals who live in the community? Yes, obviously it does. Does the Camphill way of being with the people who live in the community compare favourably with contemporary thoughts about how to be with people? Yes, it does. In fact, in many ways, the Camphill model exemplifies the kind of quality caregiving we are seeking in so many of our programmes for young people and adults.

But one might read what I have written about how this Camphill School meets the needs of the people who live there or that it is in tune with contemporary practice and ask 'but can't this happen anywhere? Would it not be better for it to happen in a more 'normal' community?' Sadly, the answer has to be 'no'.

What is present at Camphill School in Aberdeen cannot be replicated in the community. For there is something more present, and in the next short section I shall try and identify what that 'something more' is.

> I was walking down a street in a large Canadian city recently when a young woman with special needs was wheeled from her 'group home' to the sidewalk where she and her carer were going to catch a special bus. As they walked towards the corner, two young people and their mother walked by. As they passed, I heard one of the children say 'Mommy, what's wrong with her? How come she's not like us?'

The 'more normal community setting' is filled with ignorance, misunderstanding and prejudice. We may wish it was not, we may fantasise it is not, but it is. This starts to identify the important therapeutic ways in which Camphill is different from the 'wider community' and therefore also different from programmes which exist in the wider community.

Camphill is a 'Community of Belonging'. One is not isolated in a Camphill community , one is not deprived of the experience of the wider community. Rather at Camphill one has the opportunity to be a full part of a wider community without stigma, without rejection, without the unfortunately common messages that you are somehow negatively different. Here the focus is not on what is 'wrong' with you but what is 'right about you', your humanness.

At Camphill the 'Community is Therapeutic'. Everything in the community is dedicated to the health and healing of the individual. In the 'wider community' programmes for people with special needs are, in fact, isolated from that wider community. Everyone who works at Camphill or visits, comes knowing that the intention of this place is to be a healing community and therefore how you are, how you act, contributes to or detracts from the individual's healing. Unfortunately, in the 'wider community' the average individual does not care much about how his actions impact on others.

Camphill is a 'Community of Inclusion'. People may look at the Camphill programme and suggest that it is a programme of isolation where people are divorced from the wider community. Yet, when we move many people with special needs into the wider community we often times sentence them to 'isolation through normalization'.

When people with special needs live in programmes in the wider community their life is often more limited than it is at Camphill. They are restricted in where they might go, how they will be treated, what they can do. Too often their lives are lives of mediocrity, limited to activities 'inside the programme', limited to when they may 'go outside'. At Camphill these limitations are not the same. This is their community to live in fully to the extent of their desires and capability. The wider community still, unfortunately, prefers to keep people with special needs in isolation in the community. Camphill is a community of inclusion. The wider community tends to be a community of exclusion. Why would anyone suggest that being sentenced to isolation through normalisation is a better alternative than full inclusion in a community of acceptance?

In the end, after my reflections were over, I did not wonder why there are so many people living at Camphill School. I wondered why there are so few.

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