

November 22, 2017

## **The School of Social Work is excited to feature Profiles of Part-Time Faculty, Field Instructors and Alumni**

Every month we will post a profile recognizing and celebrating the work of committed and passionate social workers who have graduated from our program or have enriched the learning environment of our school.

### **Our first profile is with Part-Time Professor Peter Joseph Smyth.**

*Peter Smyth has been an part-time professor with the School of Social Work for thirty years. He has taught a variety courses including: Social Work with Groups, Introduction to Social Work and Social Policy. He believes he makes a difference by devoting his practice to humanistic social work as well. Being aware of, and opposing, the medicalization of human suffering is foundational to Peter's work, as is his opposition to prejudice and the stereotyping and stigmatizing language we have been socially conditioned to use. This has permeated his approach to teaching and practice.*

*He brings with him thirty-five years of experience in the fields of Mental Health, Rehabilitation, Adult Education and Organizational Consultation. He holds numerous certifications in the various areas of Teamwork, Leadership, Coaching, Communication, and Problem Solving. He is a senior consultant and executive development specialist with EduVision Inc., a consulting and management education firm. As a Lumina Learning practitioner, he is qualified in the administration and facilitation of personal, team, and leadership development.*

*We had the opportunity to ask Peter about his work experience, his commitment to social work and his love for teaching. This is what he told us:*

## **What are some of your employment highlights in social work?**

I began my career as a child and youth worker, working in one institutional and three group home settings. Then, a six-year stint working as a social worker in rehabilitation with people who were legally blind was followed by a decade in child welfare beginning with family services and then developing and running a community – based group work program. Subsequent to this, I was instrumental in the development of group work programs for women who were abused by their male partners, as well as programs for the men themselves (York Region and Simcoe County). The need for greater freedom in my work led me to private practice where I continue to work (in the context of a group practice) in counselling, consultation, and teaching. A part of this has involved working with The Centre for Leadership of the Ontario Government and with various ministries (as well as businesses) in the area of leadership, team development, and coaching.

## **Do you have any research interests or publications you want to share?**

I have co-authored two books, various training manuals, and numerous papers. My interest in narcissism and its effects on individual, family, and broader human systems is ongoing as is my commitment to group work and group development for individuals, families, and communities.

### **Some of my favourite publications include:**

*The Impact of Social Group Work on Social Isolation* (1986)

*Hope: A Fundamental Issue in Social Work with Groups* (1991)

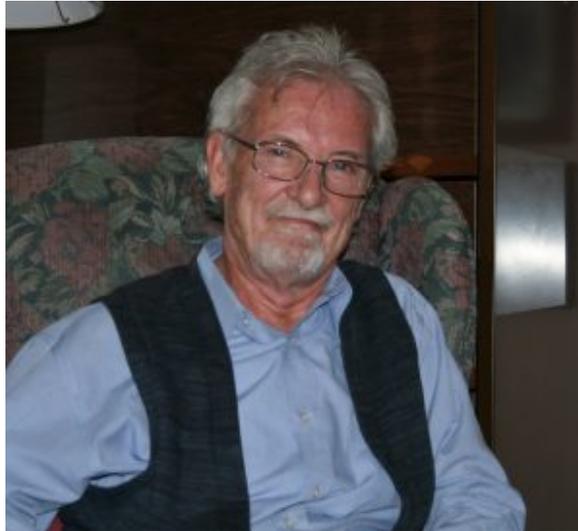
*A Phenomenological Typology of Narcissism* (2009)

*Reflective Leadership and High-Performance Organizations* (2012)

## **Why were you interested in teaching at York University's School of Social Work?**

Teaching became a career-long desire since I began studying social work. Being greatly influenced by my earlier professors at Ryerson University as well as by my mentor Norman Goroff and his colleague Viktor Frankl, I believed that I could make a difference by devoting my practice to humanistic social work as well as my teaching philosophy and methodology. Being aware of, and opposing, the

medicalization of human suffering is foundational to my work as is my opposition to prejudice and the stereotyping and stigmatizing language we have been socially conditioned to use. This has permeated my approach to my teaching and my practice.



*Peter has been teaching with the School of Social Work for thirty years*

## **Do you have any favourite teaching moments?**

There have been many. Overall, seeing the strong personal connection which students made with the humanistic perspective and how they reported on the difference this made, not only in their academic understanding of social work, but also in the applications of this in their practice settings as well as in their own lives. The concept of not having to *like* one's "clients", but having to *love* them, always aroused interesting and challenging class discussions.

## **What has been some of the best advice you have provided to students about bridging practice and theory?**

See yourself as the instrument of your work. Have faith that you, based on yourself and your social work knowledge and values, as well as your critical consciousness, can influence change in others and in their capacity to change – regardless of their circumstances. Conscious practice requires perceiving and knowing our common humanity with all. We are all in this together! Social justice cannot occur outside of a committed humanistic philosophy which is active in our own lives and in every aspect of our work with other human beings. Even in the helping professions, the Power Paradigm (based on knowledge and power over others) is widespread; whereas the application of true social work values supports the Love Paradigm (based on understanding and

power with others). Theory needs to be understood and evaluated in relation to one's personal and professional values. Conscious practice is always mindful of one's self in relation to these factors. We can indeed make a difference.

## **What have you learned from the students you taught? How have they inspired you?**

Throughout the years, the students in my class never ceased to inspire me with their life experiences, their curiosity, their sincerity in wanting to make a difference in the world, and the realization that I myself must continue to learn and always be a student.

## **What advice would you give to new social worker graduates?**

Be committed to the work and the people you work with. True commitment strengthens us, it is the basis of empowerment for all. Be mindful of social justice, whether you are engaging in family work, community work, or policy and program development. We live in a wonderful but unjust world which shows up at every level in our society and in many aspects of our daily living. Belonging and inclusion are essential to being (and feeling) human. Therefore, make group work a part of your practice or at least part of your philosophy. And always keep the faith, as well as a good sense of humour. 😊