**­The Family School Liazer**

AAFSLW Newsletter

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**Introduction**

It seems like just last week we attended the conference in Camrose but alas here we are, already into November with the holiday season just around the corner. The holiday season while celebrating family, togetherness, and giving while emphasizing joy and compassion also brings with it a tremendous amount of stress. Coping with children bouncing off the walls with excitement, attending and preparing family dinners, balancing gift giving, cleaning up after everything, and having to do it all during the cold winter months while having to shovel snow constantly! If we aren’t careful the holidays can become less of a joyous occasion meant to fill our cup and bring out our best and creep over on to the side of being just more work on top of our already busy lives.

As Family School Liaison Workers burnout is a looming reality. If we are not full ourselves how can we give to those we work with? Mindfulness was a concept brought up throughout the sessions of our conference but possibly emphasized best through Tammy Richard. The practice of mindfulness and centering in ourselves and really being aware of what we need in the moment and grounding ourselves in our surroundings is a very meaningful practice.

For someone seasoned in the practice of mindfulness it might seem easy to find time in every day to practice mindfulness. However, I find it is much more difficult to actively remember to put the work into practice. With the busy ness of the holiday season I found myself contemplating how on earth it would even be possible to find the time to practice being mindful when every task seems to need immediate attention. To this end I read an article by Jill Emanuelle titled “Enjoy the Holidays More With Mindfulness”. Which offered some great insight I hope to explore in more depth later in this newsletter. The key takeaway from this article though was that perhaps we need to slow down in order to get more out of the season.

In search of more information I turned to a newsletter from Jody Carrington. One of the key messages was that we are wired for connection and how we can lose this idea during the holiday season. It then offers insight into how we can work to re-connect with those around us.

The holiday season however is not as happy and joyous an occasion for everyone though and especially in our line of work we may see the kids who don’t tend to have the best experiences with the holiday season. On the note of the difficulties of the holiday season I read an article called “The Holiday Triangle-Thoughts for social workers” by Alan S. Wolkenstein. The article highlights the stark contrast between the joyous emotions for some and the feelings of grief and sadness for others.

As we gear up for the holiday season I hope that the information and ideas brought up in this newsletter may help to guide and support you both in your work life as well as your home and family life. We are in the business of caring and I hope that as we traverse the holiday season, we can find ways to fill our cup rather than becoming overwhelmed and running on empty.



**Word from the President**

Where do I start? I *could* start with the cliché sentiment that I cannot believe that it has already been (insert time length here) since we last saw each other or something like that, but that is not really like me. I could start with a mention of the rubber-kneed feeling I have as I enter my first year as president, but I realize that being nervous or uncertain in a new position is a by-product of cognitive distortions, and it is also not like me to engage in such self-effacement. So let me be me – a philosopher at heart, and a man who respects the uniqueness that makes us beautiful. Here goes...

Happy holidays to all who celebrate the season and a happy hiatus for those whose extent of observance is to kick back and disconnect. History has seen an ebb and flow of discontent regarding the sentiment that this season brings. Some will take offense that ‘happy holidays’ takes Christ out of Christmas, and some will see the use of the term ‘Christmas’ as being exclusive and intolerant of religious differences. This harkens the difficulty that many in the counselling field face with the potentially tempestuous gender-identity climate. Some may cite an omission of Christ from schools, others, a misguided conflation of sex and gender, and still others, an awakening of a revolution via radical acceptance of choice.

Get to the point! The thing is that regardless of our views about gender identity/confusion, we have an obligation to extend the same hand of acceptance and unconditional positive regard to whoever needs our love. We have to acknowledge our biases and beliefs so we can be vigilant of their possible exposure. We need to be aware of our word choice when we are speaking even in private circles so that our conscience can be free from narrow thinking. Let our actions speak louder than our words, and let the language of love be the great equalizer.



**Mindfulness Discussion**

Jill Emanuele discusses in her article the importance of slowing down in order to get more out of this busy season. The goal of this is to increase mindfulness as a means of reducing the stress we face going through the holiday season. While we are trying to multitask and get everything on our To Do List done where does mindfulness fit in. The response to this is that we need to make time. The brilliance of this mindfulness work is that it does not take long to do. Rather it is about finding ways to center ourselves and be grounded in our surroundings as we go through our day.

In the holiday season everything seems to get amped up. We are constantly battling a list of tasks that only seems to keep growing. However Emanuele advocates a more practical approach incorporating mindfulness into our daily activities. Some of the things mentioned in the article that we may be able to put into practice include writing down five things we are thankful for that day, focusing on all of the experiences of just one of our senses as we are walking, or even something as simple as blowing bubbles with your family but rather than trying to pop them just being present and watching where they go. These little activities help us to be attentive to ourselves and what our needs are and help to show us the little beauties of life that we might otherwise miss.

During the holidays it is easy to get lost and stuck in our own head worry about all of the things we have going on. These mindfulness practices can help to pull us out of our own head, slow down our overthinking, and allow us to better experience the joy and togetherness the season is supposed to be about.

**Introduction of the Executive Committee**

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| Picture | **President**  **Jacob Fox** joined us on the executive team just this year. In terms of years of service, he is a spring chicken, but don't let scant membership detract from years of experience. He touts 20+ years of fervent service to the pursuit of self-discovery and self-advocacy. Over these years, he has gained insight into how to teach others these skills, facilitating his position as a Family School Liaison Worker in Smoky Lake County schools. He is fun loving, but also has a philosophical side. Don't be caught sleeping while he speaks, as among the drivel, there are some real lexical gems***.*** |
| Picture | **President Elect**  **Kelsie McCabe** has been working with children and youth since she was in college in 2010. She has experience working in settings with YAC and CFS. She has also spent some time working with Big Brothers Big Sisters and a group home. “I have been working for FCSS as a Family School Liaison since 2012. I enjoy the outdoors and I like to experience new things. I am excited to take on this new opportunity as an executive |
| Picture | **Membership Co-ordinator**  **Sarah Lachance** has been working as a Family School Liaison Worker since 2013 for the Athabasca County FCSS. She has gained experience working with students from Kindergarten all the way through to adult education since graduating from MacEwan in 2008. This is Sarah’s first year as an executive member and she looks forward to the new challenge. |
| Picture | **Secretary**  **Crystal Rapson**I have worked in the field of Mental Health for the last 15 years.  It has been an amazing journey along an adventurous and windy path.  I've worked with toddlers, adults and youth all across Alberta.  In 2017, I was lucky to find the career that feels like home; working as a Family School Liaison with the Battle River School Division.  I am currently working with children, youth and families in grades 1-12 in Camrose and Sedgewick.  My self-care recipe has a dollop of art, a handful of music, a dash of competitive sports and a pinch of mindfulness...of course I can't forget to stir it up with a whole lot of laughter and family time!I am new to the AAFSLW Board this year, but look forward to getting to know the team of Family School Liaison Workers across the province. |
| Picture | **Treasurer**  **Eva Rasmussen** has been a Family School Liaison Worker for Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools for 12 years. This is her sixth year on the AAFSLW executive. Eva enjoys her position as Treasurer of the association and she looks forward to a great year. |
| N/A | **Website**  **Stacey McLennan joined the AAFSLW Executive in 2018.  Stacey has been wholeheartedly championing for others as a social worker for almost 15 years, 9 of which have been with Battle River School Division as an FSLW.  Stacey is passionate about her students, her family of six and picking up a paintbrush to unwind.  She is also excited to take on the new and exciting challenge of maintaining the AAFSLW website.** |
| **C:\Users\mcole\Downloads\IMG_1264.jpg** | **Newsletter**  **Michael Cole** became a FSLW as well as joined the AAFSLW Executive in 2018. Working for the Battle River Regional School Division he is enthusiastic about the new challenges that come with FSLW work and the path ahead. When he is not working to better help his students you can generally find Michael pursuing some sort of athletic practice or relaxing and reading. Michael is looking forward to the opportunity to work on the AAFSLW newsletter and bring interesting information to the forefront for his colleagues. |



**Re-Connection Discussion**

I mentioned Jody Carrington and the idea that we are wired for connection. The flip side to this is that while we are wired for connection, when things get hard we tend to “Armour Up”. This means that when things become the most difficult for us and we need to be supported we tend to go into defense mode and try to protect against the potential pain or failure we might experience. When we armour up we close down to those closest to us, those who want the best for us and who truly care about us. As a result we move away from that connection we are wired for.

The holidays can be a hard time for all of us. The question Jody asks is whether when we look at the people closest to us, are we really seeing them or are we just looking through them as we try to get through this busy time of year. In an attempt to circumvent this Jody suggests that we focus on reconnection. This reconnection is both for ourselves and those around us. We need to make a conscious effort not only to truly see and acknowledge those who are close to us but also to save some of that “busy” for us.

While we are so busy with trying to do everything, what are we doing for ourselves? To this end Jody suggests that we start by identifying three things that we will commit to doing that will help to fill our cup. This is the idea of self-care and that we need to take the time to do things for ourselves that make us happy and fill us up as we go out into the world. This also brings us back to the idea of mindfulness and being present in ourselves and knowing what we need and where we are at. In order to help others we first have to be able to help ourselves.



**Grief Discussion**

As FSLW’s the concepts of grief, trauma, and loss are a pretty considerable part of what we deal with on a daily basis. During the holiday season these concepts and the emotions behind them become especially prevalent. Alan S. Wolkenstein makes mention of this in his article entitled “The Holiday Triangle-Thoughts for Social Workers”. The holiday triangle discussed in the article refers to Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s. We have a tendency to expect that the holidays will mean joyfulness, happiness, and fulfillment for all. However what we don’t realise according to the article is that these expectations are unrealistic for everyone. In fact the holidays can be a time of loneliness, isolation, and deep sadness for those who have experienced loss. In our line of work this is of very real concern as that the population we are working with who have experienced this type of trauma is a lot younger and the emotions they are feeling can be new and very confusing for them to try and deal with. As well the fact that they are feeling differently during the holidays and do not have the same sense of joy and excitement as their peers can have a very othering effect on these children especially at a time when they are most vulnerable to wanting to feel a sense of belonging.

The article mentions that as part of the grieving process we grieve, we lament, and then eventually we are transformed by the memories of our past experience. Without the transformation process the pain of loss and grief can be just as strong as when the traumatic event first occurred. This is the reality for many of the children we work with. Therefore going into the holiday season it is important to recognize the issues that may come to surface along with the holiday season. The article mentions the importance of allowing people to honour and reflect upon their losses and to not have to do so alone. This is where we come in. Often we are the only support a child has and it is important for them to know that now more than ever we are there for them to give them the support they need through what might be a tough season. Hopefully we can then, as the article says, clarify and enhance the positives while acknowledging the feelings attached to this time of year.

**Membership Renewal**

Is your membership up to date? If you are paying your membership online with PayPal, you must complete a renewal form or new membership form. The electronic version is available online, at the AAFSLW website http://ww.aafslw.ca/ Please send it directly to our membership worker. If you are renewing for more than one person, each person must submit a renewal form. There are pdf copies of the forms online http://ww.aafslw.ca/ that can be printed and faxed if you prefer. Fax or email for each person renewing their membership. Please note, both payment and renewal form will need to be completed prior to your membership being processed.

