

NEXTcast Season 2 Episode 3: Ron Old and the Ripple Effect Partnership

In this episode, we talk to Child and Youth Care professor Ron Old about the links and partnerships he created between Humber College and Ripple Effect Children's Services, where he serves as program director. The partnership offers students great new learning opportunities.

Kristin Valois: Welcome to NEXTcast, a podcast about teaching and learning at Humber College. I'm Kristin Valois, and I'm an Editorial Assistant with Humber Press. In this episode, we're chatting with Ron Old, a professor in the child and youth care program. Ron is also the Program Director with Ripple Effect Children's Services, and Humber College and Ripple Effect have recently partnered in a number of ways, and we'll learn more about this relationship today. Welcome to NEXTcast, Ron.

Ron Old: Thanks very much. I'm happy to be here, Kristin.

Kristin Valois: We are happy to have you. So you've been involved in child and youth care for many years, including working at a group home, and in clinical programs, and in your own practice. So can you tell us a little bit more about your background working with youth, and what brought you to Humber College in 2006?

Ron Old: Sure. I actually started working with young people up in north Rexdale where I grew up, when I was still one. From about 14 years of age, I was volunteering at a local community center in Elmbank Community Centre, just rec programs, day camps through the summer, that kind of thing. And it really got me hooked on working with young people. I really became excited about being involved in the lives of young people, and helping them to meet their full potential. And from there, I moved on to working into more therapeutic settings with kids who were struggling in various ways. And it's just been the passion of my life, and I've never done anything else ever since.

Ron Old: I had a daughter that was born in 2004, and so I left a full-time job to be at home and be a stay-at-home dad for a few years. And then started to look around for some part-time work that would let me still use the skills that I'd developed through my career, and Humber seemed a really likely candidate for that. So I came and did an interview and started doing some instructing in the child and youth care program, and I've been here since. I really, really love it.

Kristin Valois: So you...as well as teaching part-time at Humber, you are also the Program Director at Ripple Effect Children's Services. So how did you come to be involved with that agency?

Ron Old: That's actually a new initiative. Both my wife and I have been involved in private practice with young people and families for many years, and along with other colleagues, we had been talking about the increase that we saw in young people experiencing and struggling with anxiety.

Ron Old: And so we came up with the idea, at least we were starting to bounce around ideas about trying to provide group experiences for the young people, and how else we could reach out and become involved in responding to that problem. And so we just decided we would launch this company and specifically target young people and families who are struggling with anxiety.

Kristin Valois: So Humber has recently partnered with Ripple Effect Child and Youth Services, where you are the Program Manager. So how did this partnership come about?

Ron Old: Well, as I said, initially just with some other colleagues, we'd been talking about the increase in anxiety that we were seeing and wondering about ways of responding. And at the same time, my role as teacher, kind of wrestling with finding new ways of delivering knowledge and information to Humber students and helping them understand what our approach to dealing with young people can look like.

Ron Old: So we use a very distinct approach called relational care, and that's actually one of the core foundational pieces of the child and youth care program here at Humber as well. So we were very aligned in that way. And just through conversations with colleagues both in my private practice and here at Humber ... Actually it was our coordinator of the Child and Youth Care program, Brenda Webb, who first had the idea of offering the groups through a space that we have over in the Med building that we call the play lab.

Ron Old: So it's an ideal space for that kind of group programming, and it also offered some very intriguing possibilities for projects down the road in terms of involving students both in our clinical work as researchers who may become involved, as part of their Capstone projects, and also for the ability to also possibly develop educational materials that are really tied very directly to the curriculum that we're trying to deliver in the classroom.

Ron Old: Perhaps we can use case studies or videos of the work going on, and we can actually use some of the other departments here at Humber to produce those materials. So perhaps the video department can become involved, help us to put in place some measures to protect the confidentiality of our participants. For example, the children's faces can be obscured in some way, but we could still watch what was going on in a way that was helpful to students to learn because really they want to be watching us.

Kristin Valois: Yeah, of course, yeah.

Ron Old: Working with the kids, less so than the kids themselves. So that's very exciting to just ... We're really just at the early stages of thinking about what might be possible in that regard.

Kristin Valois: And what does the play lab look like?

Ron Old: The play lab was actually specifically designed to replicate rooms in which agencies might carry out therapeutic work. So one looks very much like a classroom, and in fact does function as a college classroom. But there's a lot more artwork up on the bulletin boards, and arts and crafts supplies, and therapeutic supplies, toys and activities, and puppets, all of that sort of thing.

Ron Old: And college students will use this as part of their classes, in learning to put on activities and plan therapeutic activities for children. So they will role play these with their classmates in the play lab. And so there's actually three rooms. So that's the one main classroom, then there's another area that's all full of beanbags.

Kristin Valois: Oh fun.

Ron Old: And so that's really a fun area. People like that. We can do things like mindfulness exercises in there, guided meditations, more physically active room because it's ... activities because there's no other furniture in the room.

Kristin Valois: Yeah.

Ron Old: And then the third room is more of a family meeting room. And so it's a smaller environment, setup more to make people comfortable, and sit and just talk about what may be going on. So those are all the spaces that we're utilizing and we're thinking up ways, all the time, of using them more fully.

Kristin Valois: And so Ripple Effect has actually already partnered with Humber students, and that way, Humber online solutions. I believe it's the voucher for eBusiness program. So if I'm not mistaken, a group of students kind of made sure that Ripple Effect's online presence was up to snuff and shot some video. Maybe you can talk a little bit more about that?

Ron Old: Yeah, that's absolutely right. That's been a wonderful part of this experience, and actually I wasn't aware before we got involved in this project, but there's a number of initiatives within Humber, mostly through the Office for Research Innovation and also the Centre for Entrepreneurship, to looking at creative ways of perhaps providing learning opportunities to Humber students. And getting different departments within Humber to collaborate and work together in that way, recognizing the opportunities for crossovers.

Ron Old: And so that's been a wonderful aspect of our involvement here at Humber, is under the direction of Hanadi Alnawab, from The School of Business. We had students from graphic design, web design, photography, videography, and they all provided original content to us. It was just a huge boost for a brand new startup just trying to get going, and we didn't know anything about all of those kinds of ... of that world.

Ron Old: So it was very exciting for us to have their input, and we're very, very happy they produced a logo for us. They produced ... They gave us a lot of input on our web design, the original video and photography content that we have, we continue to use, and all kinds of marketing materials.

Kristin Valois: And this initiative is new, right? It's only September.

Ron Old: It's brand new. We just launched in September. Yeah, absolutely. It's been awhile coming. The response has been very, very encouraging. There's a lot of very positive response from the professional community. We're very excited to know that there's additional services out there for kids, and we're starting to do a lot more outreach, doing presentations with agencies and various groups that help to put young people and services together. So that's very exciting for us as well.

Kristin Valois: This is such important work. So thank you so much for coming to chat with us about it, and I can't wait to see where this partnership goes.

Ron Old: Well thank you so much. I'm very excited about it, and thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

Kristin Valois: Of course, thanks.

Nathan Whitlock: NEXTcast is produced by Humber Press, and the creative productions team at The Centre for Teaching and Learning. This episode was edited by Kristin Valois. Special thanks to Santino Pannoza and Eileen DeCourcy. To suggest stories for future episodes of NEXTcast, or to just to let us know what you think, email humberpress@humber.ca. That's humberpress@humber.ca. Thanks, and see you next time. That's still not a pun.