

Certification: Pathway to the Future

An Interview with James Freeman
by Michael Mitchell-Editor

James Freeman has over 25 years of experience and leadership in relational care across a variety of practice settings including education, out-of-school time programs, family camping, and residential care. He holds a master's degree in organizational leadership from Biola University and is the training director for Casa Pacifica Centers for Children and Families.



He serves on the boards of the American Association of Children's Residential Centers (AACRC), the International Child and Youth Care Network, and is the president of the Child and Youth Care Certification Board. He has presented at national conferences and CYC gatherings in the USA, Canada, Greece, Scotland, Australia, and South Africa.

He has published over 40 articles on relational child and youth care. He serves on the editorial advisory board for the [Journal of Relational Child and Youth Care Practice](#) and is an editor and columnist at [CYC-Net](#).

Q. What do you see as the biggest challenge facing direct care staff in today's child and youth care environment?

A. One of the biggest things facing child and youth care practitioners today is the challenge of supporting the real and complex needs of children and families within the demands of multiple systems, organizations, and changing legal requirements. There is much happening on the state and national levels across our country related to child and youth care practice.

Q. How do you see the Child and Youth Care Certification helping direct care professionals meet that challenge?

A. Certified workers are valued because of their commitment to quality work with children and families. They demonstrate this through their completion of a comprehensive assessment and in the process they become more reflective workers.

Q. How does Casa Pacifica support staff members in obtaining certification?

A. Those who have achieved professional certification add value to our organization. We support them by providing in-service training, mentoring through the certification process, covering the testing and application fees, and providing a \$2,000 annual increase once certification is awarded. Rather than make certification mandatory for staff across our programs we have intentionally made it optional, yet for some positions requiring certification for advancement or promotion.

Q. Why do you feel that agency and program directors should promote Certification within their organizations?

A. Encouraging professional level certification is one of the best quality assurance strategies an organization can implement. It grounds practitioners in a deeply respected body of knowledge and skills and provides a framework to develop and deliver professional development opportunities in a structured and integrated fashion. Certified practitioners have demonstrated their commitment to quality practice and working with young people and their families in meaningful ways.

Q. What do you see as the connection between "best practices" and certified staff at Casa Pacifica?

A. The process of professional certification has a strong foundation of research and evaluation. In a 2013 qualitative study on the impact of certification, participants shared their experience with the process established a baseline of competence, increased their motivation and confidence, and promoted reflective practice. These individual credentials compliment organizational accreditation and provides a robust means of communicating a commitment to quality support for children and families - especially to those depending on us to help in times of stress, difficulty, and pain. Because certified workers have taken additional steps in their career to make these qualities clear in their work, it's no surprise they are more likely to be viewed as high performing workers by their supervisors.

For more information on child and youth care professional certification go to: <http://www.cycceb.org/>



Casa Pacifica Centers for Children and Families is a multi-service non-profit organization serving over 450 families each day through a range of licensed & nationally accredited special education, community, and residentially-based programs with a focus on supporting families in the crossroads of child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice systems. In addition to a 25-acre campus providing supports for some of the most intensive needs, they provide a range of family supports and emergency response in local homes and schools spanning the coastline and counties north of Los Angeles in California.

Contact information

James Freeman, MA, CYC-P

Training Director

Casa Pacifica Centers for Children and Families

jfreeman@casapacifica.org

James Freeman is the training director at Casa Pacifica Centers for Children and Families in southern California. He is the current president of the [Child and Youth Care Certification Board](#), a board member with the [Association for Children's Residential Centers](#), and an editor for the [International Child and Youth Care Network](#). He can be reached at jfreeman@casapacifica.org.