Celebrating 20 residential childcare developments from across the world

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Abstract

This issue celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care. While the journal has a very important place in residential childcare in Scotland, its readership and contributors are now increasingly global. As my way of marking this anniversary, and reflecting back, in this article I discuss 19 other residential childcare developments over the last 20 years from across the world. These include developments in policy, practice and research, the establishment of new professional organisations, programmes and services, and some new professional development and learning opportunities. Personal, subjective and, no doubt, eclectic, these developments and others, both large and small, are also worth celebrating. In most countries, the last three years or so have been tough for residential childcare. However, as we look forward to the next 20 years of the journal and the future of residential childcare more broadly, let's also recognise, acknowledge and celebrate these and other collective achievements and strengths.

Keywords

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Introduction

This issue celebrates the 20ᵗʰ anniversary of the *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*. I would still have been living in Scotland when the journal was launched. Working at Aberdeenshire Council's headquarters in the Northeast of Scotland, fresh copies probably came to me in a box for distribution. As I recall, the box was expected. However, while there may have been a launch party in Glasgow, there wasn't much fanfare in Aberdeen – back then no launch video, no webinar, and no announcement on Twitter. As an ex-residential childcare worker I was certainly intrigued, and particularly so as one of the articles had been written by a former colleague. However, I'm not sure that back then I knew quite what to make of it. As it happens, this year is also a 20-year anniversary for me and my family. It is 20 years since we left Aberdeen airport on a flight to London Heathrow, and then others to Los Angeles, Fiji and Auckland, to start a new life in New Zealand. A new adventure for us all and one that would for the next two years also take me back to residential childcare – this time in a national leadership role. As such, writing this is conjuring up many personal as well as professional reflections.

The journal has a very important place in residential childcare in Scotland, but its readership and contributors are now increasingly global. As my way of marking this anniversary and celebrating quality residential childcare, in this article I discuss 19 other residential childcare developments over the last 20 years from across the world, and in particular Europe, North American and Oceania. These include developments in policy, practice and research, the establishment of new organisations, education programmes and services, professional development and learning opportunities. My selections are personal, subjective and, no doubt, eclectic. However, these developments and others, both large and small, are also worth celebrating.

Developments in policy, practice and research

Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (International)

The rights conferred on all children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) are particularly important for those in residential and foster care. Furthermore article 20 specifically concerns "the right to special protection and support for children who cannot live with their parents", while article 25 also relates to children placed away from home and provides children and young people with the right to have their circumstances regularly reviewed.

Beyond these individual rights, there is also now greater recognition that under UNCROC signatories have a number of broader responsibilities towards those in state care and care leavers (Munro et al., 2011), arising from the 2010 *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* (United Nations General Assembly, 2010). Many or most of the 167 sections are applicable to residential childcare, and sections 123-127 specifically outline the following requirements:

123: Small family-like residential provision and purposeful placements.

124: Separate residential provision for children solely in need of protection, from those involved with the youth justice system.

125: Rigorous screening procedures to avoid unnecessary admissions into residential care.

126: Residential facilities are sufficiently staffed with those able to provide individual, relationship-based, purposeful and safe care.

127: The recruitment and solicitation of children for placement in residential care should be prohibited.

From my perspective the 2010 guidelines were a particularly welcome development. However, not all jurisdictions that I am familiar with yet sufficiently comply with all these requirements.

Consensus Statement of the International Work Group on Therapeutic Residential Care (International)

Established in April 2016, the International Work Group on Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC Work Group) is 'a small invitational association of international researchers, scholars and practitioners dedicated to the continuous improvement of high quality therapeutic residential services through research, cross-national dialogue and dissemination of evidence-based information' (TRC Work Group, n.d., para 1). Their Consensus Statement takes the form of a journal article (Whittaker et al., 2016) in *Residential Treatment for Children and Youth*, and various other publications.

The following definition of therapeutic residential care has been adopted:

> Therapeutic residential care involves the planful use of a purposefully constructed, multi-dimensional living environment designed to enhance or provide treatment, education, socialization, support, and protection to children and youth with identified mental health or behavioral needs in partnership with their families and in collaboration with a full spectrum of community-based formal and informal helping resources (Whittaker et al., 2014, p. 24).

The Consensus Statement also includes the following five underpinning principles:

1. First, do no harm.

2. Grow partnerships between families and professionals.

3. Get grounded in communities, cultures, and social relationships.

4. Develop a culture that recognises the centrality of deeply personal human relationships.

5. Build evidence-based models or strategies that are effective, replicable, and scalable (Whittaker et al., 2016).

The resulting article was co-authored by 32 founding members from across 16 different countries. It has been translated into Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Hebrew

and Japanese, disseminated through a range of appropriate journals, and endorsed by key international professional bodies (TRC Work Group, n.d.).

Young People from a Public care background: Pathways to Education in Europe project (Denmark, England, Hungary, Spain, and Sweden)

Led by Sonia Jackson at the University of London Institute of Education, the *Young People from a Public care background: Pathways to Education in Europe* (YiPPEE) project was a large multi-national research project (Jackson & Cameron, 2014). With a research team in each of the five countries, this major multi-phased project sought to explore the educational circumstances of young people in care and formerly in care, and to identify how more young people with a care background could be encouraged to remain at school longer and then enabled to access tertiary education.

In the final report, 16 recommendations were made as to how the education of young people in care, and the transition to tertiary education in particular, could be improved. These included:

- governments collecting and publishing more reliable information on the education of children in care;

- social work agencies giving education much more attention in relation to those in care and formerly in care;

- education organisations providing individual tuition and mentoring support to compensate for gaps in schooling; and

- encouraging children and young people to defer entry into the labour market for as long as possible.

Reduced use of large isolated secure facilities

Over recent years, the use of large secure facilities located in isolated rural areas has fallen in many countries, and in some Anglo-American jurisdictions in particular. As such, the numbers of children in secure care in these jurisdictions has fallen, and with some exceptions, residential facilities have become smaller

and located closer to where children ordinarily live (Matheson, in press). In North America in relation to youth justice, while not new, the Missouri Model of Juvenile Rehabilitation continues to be very influential. For example, in New York City, the Taskforce on Transforming Juvenile Justice (2009) found that the previous youth justice system was harming children, wasting money, and endangering the public; The Missouri Model approach and principles are reflected in New York State's Close to Home initiative (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). In non-Anglo-American countries the use of any secure provision appears to be highly variable e.g., Norway has eight secure youth justice beds for the entire country.

The Promise

In my time I've read a lot of review reports on residential and foster care. However, February 2020 saw the publication of what I would consider to be the most audacious of them all – the seven Scottish *Independent Care Review* reports (2020). The review argues that Scotland needs to:

- acknowledge the lasting pain that removal has caused many children, families and communities;

- fundamentally re-think why, when and how children are removed from their families;

- develop more holistic support for families, spanning both universal services and intensive long-term family support provision, so that far fewer children need to come into care in the first place;

- have the compelling international evidence on poor average outcomes for children in care to-date front-of-mind, and ensure that outcomes are actually improved;

- stop tolerating poor quality care, and redesign for the future;

- reconceptualise 'care', both in terms of policy and practice, to be caring through relationships with carers and workers, siblings, family, friends and other supportive networks;

- also reconceptualise the very notion of 'professional relationships'; carers and workers must be encouraged 'not to step back but to step in';

- while recognising that qualifications and training continue to be important, place much more emphasis on recruiting people with the right ethos and qualities in the first place;

- ensure that organisational systems and processes fit around children and their families, and not the other way round;

- plan for the majority of current crisis services to in time become obsolete; and

- really listen to children and meaningfully and appropriately involve them in decisions about what they need and want.

Given the timing coincided with COVID it didn't get much international attention then or since. However, for those of us outside of Scotland, in my view its implementation is one to watch.

Growing debate about physical restraint (international)

Over recent years, in Anglo-American jurisdictions in particular, there has been growing debate, both in and outside of the profession, about the place of physical restraint in contemporary residential provision. Despite an absence of international comparative research on this topic, there has nonetheless been an increase in individual studies (Matheson, in press-b).

In Scotland, the Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group (SPRAG) formed out of presentations, conversations and a collective concern at recent Scottish Institute of Residential Child Care conferences. SPRAG is specifically focused on residential childcare organisations and practitioners; this national initiative concentrates on reducing the use of physical restraint (Centre of Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, n.d.). In a similar vein in the US, earlier this year, the National Association of Children's Residential and Community Services (2022) held an event entitled *Relationships First: Committing to the Reduction and Elimination of Restraints* and has committed to hosting a series of follow-up events.

National apologies and professional humility and empathy (international)

A very long time coming, over recent years we have seen a number of historical apologies being issued to those abused and neglected as children in various forms of residential and foster care. Across Anglo-American countries these include:

- The Australian Prime Minister's apology to 'forgotten Australians' and former 'migrant children' (Rudd, 2009).

- The UK Prime Minister's apology to former 'child migrants' (Brown, 2010).

- The Pope's apology for the 'evil' that was perpetrated towards Indigenous children in many of its Canadian residential schools (Winfield & Gillies, 2022).

- The Irish Taoiseach and the Catholic primate of All Ireland apologies for the mother and baby homes that abused and shamed unmarried mothers and their children (Carroll, 2021).

- The New Zealand Public Service Commissioner's apology to survivors at the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care (Tahana & Olley, 2022).

While such apologies are often too late for many or most of those affected, and not necessarily something to celebrate per se, they can be very meaningful for victims and their families. Such events are also part of our professional history, and a prism through which we, residential childcare providers, and power, are still seen today.

Establishment of new professional organisations

International Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood from Care (international)

The International Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood from Care (INTRAC) is an international community of researchers who work together to promote national and international research on transitioning from care. Formed

in 2003 by bringing together a small group of researchers from Europe, the Middle East, Australia, Canada and the US, it was inspired by a belief that a better understanding of transitioning from care had the potential to contribute towards better outcomes for this group (Stein, 2016). Outputs have included three major books on the topic, with contributions from members and others, from around the world (i.e., Mann-Feder & Goyette, 2019; Mendes & Snow, 2016; Stein & Munro, 2008). Now a larger global organisation, as well as three thematic interest groups on disability, higher education, and care leavers as parents, three independent researcher networks are also affiliated to INTRAC as regional chapters i.e. the African Network of Care-leaving Researchers, the UK-Ireland INTRAC Research Network, and the Nordic Research Network on Care Leavers.

Website: https://globalintrac.com/

National Therapeutic Residential Care Alliance (Australia)

The National Therapeutic Residential Care Alliance is an Australian collaborative network of non-government residential childcare provider organisations, researchers and other supporters, who develop, share and promote best practices, and advocate for quality residential provision. Recognising that therapeutic residential care models were developing concurrently across Australia, it started in 2012, 'when a group of like-minded colleagues working across States and Territories of Australia opened a discussion about the possibilities of working together to share our collective wisdom and knowledge about best practice in therapeutic residential care for high risk young people' (Bristow, 2018, para. 4). The network provides and supports advocacy, research, workforce development and cross–jurisdiction engagement. Its stated mission is: 'To ensure residential care is a valued element of out of home care, where children and young people feel safe, heal, and reach their full potential' (National Therapeutic Residential Care Alliance, 2021). Outputs have included a number of research reports and articles undertaken by or for the Network or its member organisations (e.g., McLean, 2018; McNamara & McLean, 2017). Website: https://ntrca.com.au

National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (England)

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) is a community of education and other professionals working together for care experienced people. The aim of NNECL is to transform the opportunities available to care leavers by championing continuous improvement of local practice, multi-agency partnerships and national collaboration. It does this by celebrating and sharing effective practice; advocating with policymakers and other sector organisations in higher and further education; commissioning and disseminating research; providing training, events and guidance materials; and working collaboratively with other relevant charities and sector organisations. One major new initiative has been the development of the NNECL Quality Mark to support further and higher education organisations to achieve the best outcomes for their care experienced students. It builds on the legacy of an earlier quality mark developed by the Buttle UK charity.

Website: https://www.nnecl.org/

VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai (New Zealand)

The New Zealand organisation VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai, connects children and young people who have been or are in care, and promotes their individual and collective voice on the care system. VOYCE stands for 'Voice of the Young and Care Experienced'; Whakarongo Mai is from the Māori language and translates as 'Listen to me'. A long time coming, the establishment of VOYCE in 2017, was a partnership between young people, government, and the philanthropic and non-government sectors, and addressed a major gap in the New Zealand child welfare system (Matheson, 2016). Whether focused on connection and voice, and/or adult advocacy, most Anglo-American jurisdictions in particular have had some form of organisation for children in care in place for years, if not decades; for example, the CREATE Foundation in neighbouring Australia was established in 1993, while Who Cares Scotland? was founded in 1978. With staff across several New Zealand cities, VOYCE also runs local events and experiences. VOYCE is co-funded by government and philanthropy partners.

Website: https://voyce.org.nz

Development of new programmes and services

Transitioning from care developments (international)

A few years ago, when I wrote in my first ever book chapter, I stated that in New Zealand, unlike most other Anglo-American jurisdictions, we effectively had no statutory transitioning from care provision (Matheson, 2016); in contrast Scotland has as I recall had transitioning from care legal duties in place since 1968. Recently we've seen major transitioning from care developments. In the US, states now have the option to provide accommodation and support for those transitioning from care, with a lot of attention being paid to the CalYOUTH research (Courtney et al., 2020) in California. There have been major developments in other Anglo-American jurisdictions too, for example Victoria Australia and indeed New Zealand, as well as in some other European countries.

A recent key policy and practice focus across many jurisdictions has been extended foster care; this is where young people could be supported to remain with their foster carer beyond the age of 18 and potentially up until the age of 21. In England, a residential variant has emerged that complements their extended foster care programme *Staying Put*. The *Staying Close* programme model (Department for Education, 2022) offers stable move-on accommodation to young people at the age of 18, alongside practical and emotional support provided by a member of staff from their former children's home or someone else who they know and trust. Piloted since 2017-18, the programme is now being expanded.

Virtual School Heads (England)

The English Virtual School Heads initiative for children in residential and foster care, was piloted back in 2007-09 across 11 local authorities, evaluated, and subsequently rolled out across all of England. Virtual School Heads are usually senior roles – often former primary or secondary Principals or Deputy Principals. Straddling care and education, they essentially champion and oversee, influence, direct, plan and monitor. They may also provide support and advice to schools and those in residential and foster care. These are also statutory roles. The

English Children and Families Act 2014 requires local authorities in England to appoint at least one person for the purpose of discharging the local authority's duty to promote the educational achievement of its looked after children. As such, and usually with little or no additional staffing under their direct control, they complement the role of traditional school heads and senior staff. While not a statutory role, the four LOOKOUT education support centres in Victoria are based on this Virtual School Heads model.

National Association of Virtual School Heads website https://navsh.org.uk

Raising Expectations (Australia)

Launched in 2015 the Raising Expectations programme in Victoria is currently supporting approximately 700 care experienced further and higher education students (Victoria Department of Education and Training, 2022). Established with a three-year philanthropic grant, and now funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Training, Raising Expectations is a Victorian cross-sectoral collaboration between the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (Victoria's peak body for Child and Family Services), La Trobe University and Federation University Australia. Swinburne University of Technology joined the collaboration in late 2019. Notably, Federation University Australia and Swinburne University of Technology are two of Australia's six dual-sector universities i.e. they provide further education vocational courses alongside higher education university courses.

Raising Expectations aims to increase the number of care experienced young people going on to tertiary education by:

- lifting the educational aspirations and expectations of and for young people in care;

- improving the knowledge and skills of carers and professionals to better support the educational needs of young people in care and after care;

- implementing awareness-raising programmes and outreach services for students, carers, educators and other professionals to encourage participation in tertiary education; and

- providing wraparound support at university.

Individually, the three universities may also offer scholarships that are specific to care experienced young people.

Website: https://www.raisingexpectations.com.au

Propel website (UK)

The Propel website is developed and maintained by Become (formerly The Who Cares? Trust), the English charity and advocacy organisation for children in care and young care leavers. Propel is a fully searchable website providing children in care and care leavers with comprehensive information on the support available to them from colleges and universities offering higher (undergraduate or postgraduate) education courses. Young people considering applying for a higher education course at college or university – and the professionals supporting them – can access information about each institution's pastoral and financial provision for care leavers including:

- whether year-round accommodation is available

- what bursaries and grants are on offer

- what help and support care leavers can expect, and

- who they should get in touch with at each institution.

Most UK colleges and universities, including prestigious traditional research-intensive universities, have chosen to be featured on the website. Propel has been independently evaluated by the University of Northampton (Alexander & Callaghan, 2017). Furthermore, care leavers are recognised as a priority group by the Office for Students, the independent regulator of higher education in England. The Office for Students expects all organisations to provide support to care leavers across all access, retention and progression activities.

Website: https://propel.org.uk

Professional development and learning

A better qualified workforce (international)

Increasingly jurisdictions and organisations are requiring their residential childcare workers to hold an academic and/or professional qualification. This is particularly the case in Europe, where for example:

- Finland: Half of any residential care team must have a degree in either social services or health care (James et al., 2021).

- Germany: Most Social Educators (residential care workers) have a Social Work degree, Social Pedagogy degree, or another vocational degree (James et al., 2021).

- Italy: Residential care workers require a degree in Educational Sciences. Continuing education and supervision are mandatory in many regions, and a new residential care Master's programme was established at Milano Bicocca University in 2020 (James et al., 2021).

- Lithuania: Guardianship teams are comprised of residential care workers with a degree in social work (James et al., 2021).

- Scotland: Residential childcare workers need to be registered with the Scottish Social Services Council; they require both a practice qualification and a knowledge qualification (Scottish Social Services Council, 2022).

- Spain: A degree qualification is required to be a Social Educator (Residential Care Worker) (Matheson, in press-a).

Evidence-based practices

When discussing residential childcare with US and European colleagues I generally find that those from the US frame this around evidence-based programmes, aka Manualised Evidence-supported Treatments (MEST), while those from Europe prefer to frame residential childcare around practice. I love a good quality evidence-based program, and with some I am in awe of the quality of the design thinking, the translation of this into clear systems and processes, and the centrality of research, monitoring and quality assurance. However, I come from the Scottish practice tradition, and in New Zealand we often find that programmes deemed to be evidence-based elsewhere, tend not to *transplant* here particularly well. However, a middle path has emerged in recent years – Empirically Supported Practices (ESPs), aka Evidence-Based Practices, Common Elements, Common Factors or Kernels approach. In the book From *Evidence to Outcomes and Child Welfare,* Mildon et al. (2014, define ESPs as:

> effective skills, techniques, and strategies that can be used by an individual practitioner. Such practices describe core intervention components that have been shown to reliably produce desirable effects and can be used individually or in combination to form more complex procedures or programs (p.87).

As well as providing a middle path in relation to being evidence-informed, ESPs can also offer one in relation to the training and professional development of both qualified and unqualified staff.

Residential child and youth care in a developing world (international)

Published by CYC-Net Press, this edited series of four volumes on residential childcare, is in my view an amazing resource. There are other excellent edited books with contributors from different countries on residential childcare (e.g., Courtney & Iwaniec; 2009; Whittaker et al., 2015). While I am maybe a little biased as the editors Leo Fulcher and Tuhinul Islam invited me to write the New

Zealand chapter (Matheson, 2016) I just love the audacity of its much wider range of authors and countries. The four volumes are as follows:

1. Global perspectives (Islam & Fulcher, 2016)

2. European perspectives (Islam & Fulcher, 2017)

3. Middle East and Asia perspectives (Islam & Fulcher, 2018)

4. African perspectives (Islam & Fulcher, 2021).

Easier access to residential childcare reports, books and articles (international)

On my social worker qualifying course in the 1980s at the (now) University of the West of Scotland, the focus was very much on the role of the generic social worker. As far as I can remember we did not really study residential childcare, and certainly no specific residential childcare theories or practice frameworks. I would have graduated and been working in England before I read my first book on the residential care of children: *The Hour of the Wolf and other Short Stories* by Phil Carradice (1985). My first real exposure to residential childcare theory would have been in my third residential role, by now in the Northeast of Scotland – Fritz Redl and his life space interview were regularly discussed in supervision.

However, over the last 20 years there has been an explosion in the availability of, and access to, residential childcare reports, books and articles (and now webinars, online training courses, podcasts and blogs too). *The Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care* has been free and open access since 2011. Today reports are freely available to all, and, with the exception of many academic textbooks, most other books can easily be bought as eBooks. Additionally, despite so many other journals being hidden behind the paywalls of only five international conglomerates, with some effort and creativity residential childcare professionals who are not studying can now access almost as many journal articles as their studying colleagues.

Conclusion

So, there you have it; my personal selection of another 19 developments in residential childcare from the last 20 years' worth celebrating. In most countries, the last three years or so have been tough for residential childcare. However, as we look forward to the next 20 years of the journal, and the future of residential childcare more broadly, let's recognise, acknowledge and celebrate these and other collective achievements and strengths. I wonder how these, and other new developments, will fare over the next 20 years, and who will be the existing, emerging, and future professional or care experienced leaders to take them forward.

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About the author

Dr Iain Matheson is Director of the New Zealand-based Research Centre for Better Outcomes from Fostering and Residential Care. His 2015 doctorate was on the education of care leavers. A social worker by background, Iain first worked in residential care practice before moving into management, including the New Zealand government's national leadership role for residential and foster care. He now helps organisations in New Zealand and internationally, to generate and use evidence and learning on statutory care and its alternatives.

As well as research and consultancy, Iain mentors leaders and teams, facilitates groups, and delivers training workshops and events.