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Book review

Book Title

Child Poverty: Aspiring to Survive

by Morag C Treanor

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Aspiring to Survive was published in February of 2020, at the precipice of the Covid-19 pandemic which has impacted every aspect of our lives and shone a harsh light on the inequalities in our society, as well as exacerbating them. In *Aspiring to Survive*, Treanor asserts that child poverty is never inevitable, and that even in times of financial scarcity the right government decisions can prevent it.

Few could be more qualified than Professor Morag Treanor to speak to child poverty in Scotland. With an extensive research career in this area, she has been a member of the Child Poverty Action Group's advisory board, is a commissioner of the Scottish Government's Poverty and Inequality Commission and is a member of The Promise Scotland's oversight board. Furthermore, the personal reflections she offers on her own experiences and motivations to carry out this research are poignant and ensure that readers understand this book not just in terms of abstract policy decisions, but in the context of real lives of children and their families.

The core message and approach of this book is that child poverty is not inevitable, and it is what governments choose to do (or not do) that can either exacerbate or eradicate child poverty. This leads to a critical exploration of the myths and stigma around poverty, especially where these shift the blame for poverty on to the individuals experiencing it rather than the systems that cause it. *Aspiring to Survive* takes an approach of shedding light on these myths and stigma by presenting the reader with a comprehensive evidence base to challenge them, inviting us to 'flip' our thinking and make up our minds on what policy decisions are needed.

This evidence is made up of findings from longitudinal research that Treanor has carried out with families since 2013, alongside analysis of wider quantitative datasets to ensure these findings are representative of all families across Scotland and the UK. This approach is helpful for supporting her arguments around policy, and also means that *Aspiring to Survive* is an excellent resource and reference point for anyone working to understand child poverty.

Aspiring to Survive also provides detailed context around policy on child poverty internationally. There is particular attention to policy across the U.K. where reserved matters, as well as the myriad of ways that economics, culture and media interact across the border, make what happens in Westminster relevant to Scotland. However, if one of the aims of this book is to 'shed the light' on how the myths around poverty mutually enforce and inform policy decisions that exacerbate poverty, this raises a question about what this means in a Scottish context, where there are several notable differences in policy around child poverty, such as the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, or the Scottish Child Payment. Whilst these differences in legislation and policy initiatives are raised in *Aspiring to Survive*, what would be especially useful to see in future publications would be a more in-depth examination of the implementation of policies seeking to reduce child poverty in Scotland, as we know that there can often be a stark difference between the *intention* of a policy and the effect it has on people's day to day lives.

Changes to legislation to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law is one example of where we need to pay attention to how policy change makes a difference in the lives of children and families. Upholding the economic rights of children, which are interdependent and indivisible from all other rights under the convention such as play, good health, or being able to grow up safely with one's family, is an integral part of UNCRC incorporation. The action needed to uphold these rights may bring up challenges that are distinct from work to uphold other rights, and so *Aspiring to Survive* will be invaluable to those working in policy or practice to ensuring all aspects of UNCRC incorporation are successful.

Aspiring to Survive was published at the same time as the culmination of Scotland's Independent Care Review. Driven by children, adults and families with experience of the 'care system', it was a root and branch review seeking to understand how to love and care for Scotland's children with care experience. Amongst other reports produced by the review, *The Money*, written by Katharine Trebeck, argued that the cost of poor financial and other policy decisions to the wellbeing of the people in and around the 'care system' was too high, and set out the argument for planning an economy based on improving people's

wellbeing, a 'wellbeing economy'. Since then, there has been a commitment from across Scotland, including by the Scottish Government, to 'Keep The Promise' to children and families to make the changes urged by the review, of which addressing poverty and is a core priority. There is a swell of ambition and momentum to make changes, which are not shy about challenging deeply engrained systems and structures, when necessary, but there is work to do to enable it to translate into real change in the lives of children and their families experiencing poverty.

The aims of *Aspiring to Survive* are tightly connected to many of the recommendations of the Independent Care Review as set out in The Promise. As Scotland begins to undertake the work needed to meet these recommendations, we will be using the rigorous and evidenced based policy analysis in *Aspiring to Survive* to play our part in this work and would welcome any development that further aligns *Aspiring to Survive* to ongoing work to upholding The Promise and the UNCRC. This work is all the more urgent in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath, which risks further entrenching inequality and poverty. The accessible and evidenced based approach in *Aspiring to Survive* will be an integral part of the toolkit for anyone who is interested in, or working to ensure that Scottish policy not only alleviates poverty and inequality but eradicates it.

References

Trebeck, K. (2020) [The Money](#). Independent Care Review.

About the authors

Kate Mackinnon is a Policy Associate at CELCIS. She supports CELCIS to influence, shape and set policy that centres the needs and voice of children and young people in need of care and protection. Within this role she leads work at CELCIS on improving experiences when accessing care records. Her background is in supporting children and adults who are experiencing domestic abuse, sexual violence or abuse.

Rosie Moore is the Policy & Participation Advisor at CELCIS. She supports CELCIS to embed participation in both an operational and strategic manner, that champions the voice of children and young people in all areas of work. Within this role she leads on several pieces of participation work at CELCIS, most recently around the recruitment of new CELCIS Strategic Board members with lived experience. Her background is in supporting children and adults who have lived experience of care, predominantly through her work at the Independent Care Review and her Board roles at STAF and Each and Every Child.