

Editorial

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As I write this editorial in the midst of a global pandemic, it feels unreal to think how different the world was when I was writing the introduction to our February issue. All our lives have been changed utterly by COVID-19. While the virus itself appears generally to cause only mild symptoms in children, despite emerging evidence that some infected children can become seriously ill, the wider effects of COVID-19 on children and young people are likely to be tragically significant. The UN Children's Fund, UNICEF, has described the health crisis caused by COVID-19 as 'quickly becoming a child rights crisis' (UN, 2020). The problem is particularly acute in low and middle-income countries where financial and infrastructural pressures could have devastating effects on routine health provision, leading to vast numbers of deaths of young children in the absence of concerted efforts by the wealthiest countries. UNICEF also highlights potential impact on access to immunisations and the negative consequences of restrictions on normal living for mental health, education and child protection. Women and girls are likely to be particularly at increased risk of gender-based violence.

The crisis and the effects of lockdown and isolation have unequal consequences, affecting the already disadvantaged economically and socially most. A report by IPPR Scotland (2020) found that 49 per cent of households with dependent children in Scotland — some 300,000 households — were in 'serious financial difficulty' or 'struggling to make ends meet'. While countries varied greatly in their mitigation approaches, a common feature was the rapidity of the introduction of emergency measures, mostly with significantly deleterious consequences for children's normal rights to education, leisure and freedom of association. A survey of 95 professionals in 20 European countries conducted in

one week of April 2020, highlighted several ways in which children's rights were impinged by emergency measures, including:

concerns about the portrayal of children in the media, and the way in which they are being blamed or even criminalised, for being in public spaces. Marginalised children and young people are also particularly impacted by decisions to close public parks and play facilities. This impacts disproportionately on families living in cramped conditions, lacking outside space (garden, terrace, balcony), natural light or the possibility to ventilate, and on a low income; particularly on the children, young people, and women in those households (Centre for Children and Young People's Participation, 2020, p. 9).

There have also been many examples of ways in which potential disadvantages have been reduced or avoided. These have included addressing digital exclusion for families or individual young people by provision of laptops, mobile phones and internet access, and help with getting online and using video conferencing tools. In residential care, there have been reports of workers volunteering to live-in for the duration of the restriction period, or of adjusting shift arrangements to minimise traffic in and out of homes. Some of the changes to everyday living have been regarded by children and adults as definite improvements and there is clearly scope for considering which should become permanent arrangements. Much of the rhetoric about the shutting of schools has been about missed education and home schooling as a poor alternative. But there have also been anecdotal reports of benefits for children in care of not having some of the pressures of going to school (Turner, 2020). As one residential manager told this author: 'The drama of going to school can be stressful for some of our children, but without the pressure of formal education we've been engaging in education and learning at home'. One lovely example of children supporting each other was the story of a nine-year old boy, known to be highly anxious about school, observed sitting on his bed with a 16-year old girl listening to him reading aloud.

Many policy and advice organisations swiftly repurposed to provide support specifically related to COVID-19 and the impact on children and workers of mitigation measures. In Scotland, CELCIS created an [Information Point](#) microsite bringing together information and support for children's care and protection. A superb example of young people taking a lead in facing up to their own anxiety and purposefully redirecting it in support of others came from the Good Shepherd Centre in Bishopton, Scotland. With the help of their media teacher the young people researched positive stories and broadcast a 'positive posters from around the world' series on Twitter (access [here](#)). Their '[What If](#)' film is very well worth viewing.

The *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care* will contribute to our developing understanding of how care experienced children and young people have been affected by the virus and efforts to mitigate its impact. We will be publishing a series of 'special feature' articles on the [SJRCC](#) web pages in which our correspondents from around the world describe how the everyday lives of children and those who care for them have been changed. We also plan to bring these and other articles together in a special collection later in the year.

The current issue of *SJRCC* was planned to coincide with the annual conference of the Scottish Institute of Residential Child Care, sharing the conference theme, 'the extraordinary ordinary: the power of everyday care'. Though the articles which form this collection were mostly conceived before the virus impacted our lives, the choice of theme could hardly have been more prophetic.

The issue begins with two peer-reviewed research articles. Sheila Ramaswamy and Shekhar Seshadri consider the deinstitutionalisation debate in India and conclude that while it is a desirable goal interim measures should be directed at, among other things they enumerate, improving child care institutions, including better physical infrastructure, with smaller and more intimate institutions with better staff-child ratios. Danny Henderson and Robin Dallas-Childs explore what home and belonging mean to young people and how residential child care can provide the conditions for the experience of home and a sense of belonging through care worker-young person relationships, grounded in everyday activities and exchanges.

There then follow eleven shorter articles on the theme of the extraordinary ordinary in caring for children. The scene is set by a poem specially written for this issue by care experienced poet, illustrator and social work student David Grimm. The poem was written in a time before COVID-19, but its verses seem to have so much additional meaning now.

During night terrors, you'd sit by my side, you were supposed to say no.

Instead you let me sit in the comfort of your private work zone.

You didn't complain you just sat there, quiet, with me by your side.

You cared without saying, simply by being.

Moulding our comfort until we can dream.

You make us feel human, when our hope has all gone.

The first themed article in the collection, by Laura Brown, David Grimm and Gregor Clunie, draws on discussions within a Who Cares? Scotland campaign group for care experienced people accessing their care records, but the article is significantly based on the experience of two of the authors who requested records of their own time in care. Hazel Whitters's article, Let Love Liberate our Children to Learn, is written from the context of an early years' centre and focuses on three generations of one family: Holly, her mother and grandmother.

David Lane and Robert Shaw consider the value placed on everyday professionalism and conclude that the key to successful care lies in the values and motivation of the workers.

On a related theme, Niall Reynolds explores the possibilities for social care professionals in adopting systemic approaches in thought to a range of differences and challenges in their practice, and concludes: 'We must begin to embrace these concepts as a new charter toward understanding the fragmented temporality of the present in our everyday "extraordinary ordinary" interactions with others'.

Art psychotherapist, Kerri Samsaidh, is concerned with creating healing environments in residential care, arguing that: 'Working with our hands nourishes the soul and can be applied in a variety of creative tasks for the home including cleaning, cooking, mending, making and baking'. Laura Horvath's article is based on collaborative work with the Child Reintegration Centre in Sierra Leone which transitioned its residential programmes to family-based care. 'The CRC case team conducts traditional assessments and home visits, but also teaches parents and caregivers how to parent well, build financial independence, and become empowered to care for their own children'. Residential manager, Beverley Graham, explores her own leadership journey considering how fear and blame can lead to toxic cultures and suggests tools to develop better awareness for individuals and organisations.

Nick Pike's article considers challenges for residential child care staff implementing an 'ordinary living' policy in a residential special school for children with complex learning difficulties and challenging behaviour: 'Rather than a unit wide child care philosophy, individual staff teams developed local solutions for specific rooms, specific residents and specific staff'. Marianne Macfarlane argues that while research into vicarious trauma, its impact on professionals and the consequences for clients has been limited, strategies have been developed to assist in identifying, preventing and managing symptoms but these strategies are not easily applicable to the residential child care setting, despite residential care staff working alongside young people with complex trauma. Liam Feeney describes the journey undertaken by East Park Home in Glasgow to empower care staff to demonstrate love in their practice, such that it will become a cultural norm so that all children will feel they were loved by those who supported them.

The final article in the themed section, by Shivangi Goenka and Kiran Modi, uses the experiences of a social worker in India to discuss the conditions of children and staff in children's homes, focusing on the gap between what exists in theory in the law and the increase in the intensity of the trauma the children experience. Their article considers the practical gaps in implementing laws and policies and offers suggestions for improvement.

This special issue ends with reviews by Samantha Fiander of two books: *Lowborn: Growing Up, Getting Away and Returning to Britain's Poorest Towns* by Kerry Hudson and *My Name is Why* by Lemn Sissay.

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