

Editorial

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this special edition of the Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care, devoted entirely to the health and wellbeing of looked-after children and young people.

It is usual for introductions to writings on health to include some sort of definition as to what constitutes 'health'. Many of these definitions are, of course, defined by professionals and professional institutions, with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) definition being the most influential and widely quoted since entering into force in 1948. This definition invited us to widen our understanding of health and health practice beyond one that is merely concerned with the physical state of individuals and their illnesses and diseases. Importantly, it also provided the conceptual framework that allowed us to center our attention on what is now commonly referred to as the social determinants of health. To put it simply, these are the relational aspects of our lives which impact on our health and wellbeing.

This focus is particularly relevant to the health and wellbeing of looked-after children and young people as we now understand their health and wellbeing to be influenced by an often complex range of interrelated factors that include family and social structures, social relationships and support networks as well as a range of cultural and environmental conditions, individual lifestyle factors and early childhood experiences. This understanding demands a broad-based and holistic response to the health and wellbeing of those in residential child care, an approach that we have attempted to demonstrate by the wide range of activities and interventions that comprise this special health edition.

I have spent many years in promoting the health of children and young people who live in residential care or who were leaving to move into the world beyond the residential unit. The definition of health that I have found to be most meaningful and useful was one that was defined by a young person. When asked the question "what does health mean to you", he responded "health is about feeling good about yourself".

The papers that comprise this special health edition demonstrate a wide range and variety of ways in which people are working to influence the determinants of health for young people in residential care by helping them to feel good or at least better about themselves. By doing so, they are promoting and improving young people's current and future health and wellbeing, life chances and opportunities.

The mental health of children and young people in residential care is a key consideration for policy and practice. All of the papers presented in this special health edition are considered to be concerned with helping young people to feel good or better about themselves and are therefore concerned with improving their mental and emotional health and wellbeing. We are happy to feature two papers with a particular focus on mental health. The first paper is by Allyson McCollum, the former Chief Executive of the Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health. Her paper provides a useful overview of key mental health policy and practices that impact on the mental health of children and young people in residential care. Jenny Makinson and colleagues share with us their valuable learning from the pilot of a new mental health service for young people who are looked after away from home in Moray. The contribution of Arts and Music therapy provide us with creative and stimulating ways of engaging with children and young people as part of the therapeutic process of addressing physical, emotional, cognitive and social needs. Sheena McGregor and Clare Macaulay discuss the 'Arts in Health' project designed to promote the health and wellbeing of young people in care or leaving care in Glasgow through young people's participation in the Arts. The contribution of Music Therapy to the emotional wellbeing of children in residential care is discussed by Aby Vulliamy and we also have a valuable review of this paper from a practitioner's viewpoint, written by Moyra Hawthorn. Ann Wilson discusses the work of Action for Sick Children (Scotland) in helping looked-after children and young people cope when they are ill as highlighted through three valuable case study

illustrations. 'Children's Stories' is a GP's perspective of young people and their issues from Dr Lesley Morrison, a practicing GP in the Borders and regular contributor to features on health in the Scottish media. John Brown, a health improvement practitioner within NHS Health Scotland, provides us with a useful update of the work of Scottish Government and others in relation to the development of new nutritional guidelines for residential care settings for young people. Murray Davies discusses the use of information technology to communicate about health and wellbeing and as part of young people's health assessments and reviews.

The featured papers provide a valuable insight into how health policy and practice for residential child care continues to develop in Scotland. When I started working in this area just over ten years ago, very few of these practice examples would have been in existence. Whilst advances have been made, health outcomes remain poor in a number of key areas and we clearly have a long way to go to ensure that we make positive and lasting changes that improve health outcomes for all children and young people in our care. I hope that you enjoy reading this special health edition as much as I did. I also hope that the articles and examples of practice inspire us all to continue in our efforts to help young people enjoy the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health and, ultimately, to feel good about themselves.

Steven McCluskey

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