

Editorial

Changing Lives (Scottish Executive, 2006), otherwise known as the *Report of the 21st Century Social Work Review* will be the key policy document for social service development and reform in the foreseeable future. The bulk of the report discusses the role of the social worker, and residential child care is not discussed specifically. The authors of the report admitted that it was not within their remit to look in detail at the full range of social care services (Scottish Executive, 2006, p. 7) so there may have been an excuse for the lack of discussion about the role of residential child care workers. The authors, however, did agree that:

The increasing complexity of problems faced by these children [children in residential care] emphasises the need for highly skilled practitioners in the residential child care setting (Scottish Executive, 2006, p. 23).

Apart from this acknowledgement, there was no further discussion of the specific role of the residential child care worker. Even in terms of the case study examples and literature reviewed for the report, residential child care was largely absent. The opportunity for a debate on the distinctive nature of residential child care and its links with perspectives such as social pedagogy was lost.

In recent months, however, a paper has emerged from the service development group of the *Changing Lives* programme which has important implications for residential care. This paper is entitled *Personalisation: An agreed understanding* (Scottish Government, 2007). Personalisation is seen as a key driver in the shaping of all public services, and is defined as follows:

[Personalisation] enables the individual alone, or in groups, to find the right solutions for them and to participate in the delivery of a service. From being a recipient of services, citizens can become actively involved in selecting and shaping the services they receive (Scottish Government, 2007, p. 2).

The principle of personalisation is also in line with the National Care Standards, which require practitioners and services to recognise and accept children and young people as individuals, adhering to the principles of dignity, privacy, choice, safety, realising potential, equality and diversity. There are real challenges in meeting the personalisation agenda in residential child care. These challenges are rooted in how we value children and young people in our society, and how we define the nature of their care. The challenges also relate to the often-conflicting roles of the residential child care worker in relation to care and control.

Perhaps this is a chance for residential child care workers to make their voices heard in the *Changing Lives* arena. Responses and opinions are being sought on how this term should be defined and applied to areas of practice. If an overwhelming response is received from field social work, then residential child care will have missed another opportunity to argue for its distinctiveness. Why not take a look at the paper, which can be accessed at the web address

below, and enter the debate on how personalisation needs to be defined for some of our most vulnerable children.

Scottish Government (2007). *Personalisation: An agreed understanding*. Accessed on 17th September, 2007 at www.socialworkscotland.org.uk/resources/private/personalisation.pdf

Scottish Executive (2006). *Changing lives: Report of the 21st century social work review*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.