

Editorial

Welcome to the Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care

For ten years now, I have had the privilege of chairing the management committees of both the Centre for Residential Child Care and then the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC). As I look back over the years I think Scotland can be proud of what it has set out to do in creating better services for our young people. The commitment by government to invest in setting up a unique institute in the form of SIRCC sent out a clear signal that residential child care has an enduring and important place on the spectrum of services for those children and young people who need and will continue to need public care. The very presence of this journal is evidence of the opportunity that has been taken to improve the understanding and knowledge that must underpin our services.

There is, however, still much to be done. I continue to hear professionals discount residential care as being damaging to young people. Of course, we know that the experience of being accommodated which too many young people have falls far short of the ideal, but it is also the case that very many young people have positive experiences which stay with them throughout their lives. What we do need to do, however, is to strive for greater consistency across services. At last years Who Cares (Scotland) AGM, I was struck by the number of aspiring board members (all young people with experience of care) who said that the major concern they had was to ensure that there were no longer good homes and bad homes but that all would be good. That is the challenge which all of us engaged in the provision, operation or commissioning of services must rise to.

Aspiration is my greatest concern. Do we not continue all too often to accept second best as the norm: perversely, because we think that young people will not feel comfortable or value high quality? Do we design services to stimulate and promote aspiration on the part of our young people? I suggest that we do not do this often enough. The research which has been undertaken jointly by Farm7 and SIRCC into the design of residential units and which will be published later in the year has much to say on this (Docherty, Kendrick, Sloan and Lerpiniere, 2006).

If we are to have aspirations for our young people we need to begin by building aspiration amongst the workforce. That is where SIRCC has a crucial role in providing both training and research. The *Changing Lives: Report of the 21st Century Review of Social Work* (Scottish Executive, 2006) emphasises the need to develop more evidence-based practice. That is as important for residential child care as it is for fieldwork. Having more practitioners undertaking research into what they are doing on a day-to-day basis, and then having it published in this journal, will be one way of demonstrating that we have moved to a confident and evidence-based service. If that research also tests out new ways of working, then we will see properly responsive services which can meet the ever more complex needs within the looked-after population.

I was deeply impressed a few years ago at the SIRCC Annual Conference by one of the speakers, David Arkansanya, who speaking of his long experience of being in care said that

he knew that he wanted quality in his life but too often he knew that he was not getting it. That for me is the objective we must strive for: to put quality into the life of every looked-after young person.

Sandy Cameron

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References

Docherty, C., Kendrick, A., Sloan, P. and Lerpiniere, J. (2006). *Designing with care: interior design and residential child care*. Glasgow: Farm 7 and SIRCC.

Scottish Executive. (2006). *Changing lives: Report of the 21st Century Review*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.