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## Book Review

# Revitalizing Residential Care for Children and Youth: Cross-National Trends and Challenges

**By Whittaker, J. K., Holmes, L., Del Valle, J.F., and James, S. (eds)**

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Whittaker, Holmes, Del Valle, and James are to be commended for this latest scholarly effort that builds from more than a decade of focus group consultations with established experts, and publication of core debates operating in the field whenever residential care is considered. The editors have been careful to narrow the focus of their efforts to Anglo-American exemplars (England, Scotland, Canada, USA, and Ireland) and Continental European exemplars of planful uses of residential group living with young people (Spain, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Portugal, Finland, and France). Exemplars were also provided for illustrative purposes from Argentina, Australia, and Israel, even though this latter example – which includes early military training for nearly two-thirds of the youthful population – is not illustrative of residential care operating in the Middle East. Residential care and education in contemporary Israel is closely aligned with Anglo-American exemplars, with boarding schools closely aligned with Continental European exemplars.

Of special note is the qualitative methodology developed by Sigrid James, which was employed across each of the 16 country examples using a Matrix framework that supports continuous comparative analyses of structural features of planful



environments for care and education. Postgraduate students contemplating research into residential care and its impact on young people and their families would be wise to read this book very early in their studies. Those engaged in the supervision of postgraduate students are also encouraged to make this volume a core reference around which supervision of research into any aspect of residential care can be framed.

The editors clearly set out the positive and negative histories that have surrounded the use of residential care as placement option and debates about the use of such placements. Harriet Ward offers an important historical overview of changing patterns in the use of residential care in the UK and Europe before Sigrid James identifies key elements of the Matrix that guided contributors of the 16 country-focused chapters. In so doing, the origins and trajectory of 'global deinstitutionalisation efforts' are highlighted as important social policy initiatives. Similar arguments surround 'best interests of the child' debates, without reference to the absence of research evidence that underpins such debates (Islam & Fulcher, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2021).

The editors explain that they sought residential care services built upon the following principles (Whittaker et al., 2016, pp.96–98):

- Safety first!** We are acutely mindful that the first principle undergirding Therapeutic Residential Care must be *primum non nocere*: to first, do no harm. Thus, our strong consensus is that "safety first" be the guiding principle in the design and implementation of all Therapeutic Residential Care programs.
- Partnership with families:** Our vision of Therapeutic Residential Care is integrally linked with the spirit of partnership between the families we seek to serve and our total staff complement—whether as social pedagogues, child or youth care workers, family teachers, or mental health professionals. Thus, a hallmark of Therapeutic Residential Care programs—in whatever particular cultural expression they assume—is to strive constantly to forge and maintain strong and vital family linkages.
- Contextually grounded:** Our view of Therapeutic Residential Care is one in which services are fully anchored in the communities, cultures, and web of social relationships that define and inform the children and families we serve. We view Therapeutic Residential Care programs not as isolated and self-contained islands, but in every sense as contextually grounded.
- A culture of learning through living:** We view Therapeutic Residential Care as something more than simply a platform for collecting evidence-based interventions or promising techniques or strategies. Therapeutic Residential Care is at its core informed by a culture that stresses learning through living and where the heart of teaching occurs in a series of deeply personal, human relationships.



•**A continuing search for evidence:** We view an ultimate epistemological goal for Therapeutic Residential Care as the identification of a group of evidence-based models or strategies for practice that are effective in achieving desired outcomes for youth and families, replicable from one site to another, and scalable (i.e., sufficiently clear in procedures, structures, and protocols to provide for full access to service in a given locality, region, or jurisdiction).

Each chapter facilitates cross-country comparisons around conceptually meaningful dimensions for residential care. James' Matrix provides an account of what residential care services look like in their target country. The comparative methodology is a major strength of this volume as it offers important reference points from which to target continuing research efforts. Research students should find this aspect of the volume of particular interest.

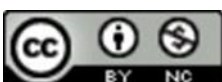
Key points and takeaways were highlighted in the summaries provided for each of the 16 country exemplars. Promising innovations and research advances were summarised at the end of each chapter with important national learnings noted. Without reservation, I wholeheartedly recommend this volume for use with Anglo-American and Continental European university postgraduate students pursuing research into any facets of residential care. This includes both graduate and postgraduate research in this field.

Greater caution is recommended for university research supervisors supporting postgraduate students from Africa and Asia studying in the UK. Direct comparisons between the 16 countries included in this Whittaker et al. volume cannot be drawn with the very different residential childcare contexts in African and Asian countries. Students researching in these countries may nevertheless find James' Matrix useful in carrying out early exploratory research in the residential care field.

Overall, I cannot recommend more highly that *Revitalizing Residential Care for Children and Youth: Cross-National Trends and Challenges* be made accessible to all students enrolled on courses in child and youth care (Scotland, Canada, and South Africa) and social work (UK, USA, Australia). Postgraduate students should strongly consider whether this volume might be purchased as a print-copy or e-book copy for use throughout their career in this field. I thank the editors for their collective efforts in making this volume available to a new generation of child and youth care graduates, as well as social work graduates who pursue careers around caring.

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## About the reviewer

Leon Fulcher, MSW, PhD is a retired professor of social work with half a century of experience in the child and youth care field – in the North America and Europe, Middle East and Africa, and Asia Pacific regions – as a practitioner, manager, educator, researcher, and scholar. For a decade he chaired the board of governors for The International Child and Youth Care Network at [www.cyc-net.org](http://www.cyc-net.org) and continues as an Asia-Pacific representative.

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