Editorial

I am delighted to welcome readers to this themed issue of the Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care, where the focus lies with leadership and management. Given the extent and range of material written about both of these topics, along with the plethora of modules and courses geared towards imbuing positive achievement in these respects, you may be thinking – justifiably – that tackling these areas represents a high ambition for a single issue. I hope that you will read on and agree that the authors here have put their shoulders to the wheel with great energy and have offered a mass of thought-provoking insights.

The enthusiasm for submitting to this issue has been admirable, not least because it is the case that while common understanding shows rising conviction to the importance of appropriate leadership and management, there remains a relatively sparse literature base which focuses directly on understanding these topics as they relate to the realm of residential child care. This means that drawing together thinking which sheds light on these areas is an important opportunity. The sum of the parts of this issue represents something of a resource, with implications for practice, policy-making and future research.

Anyone courageous enough to attempt a summary of the characteristics of good leadership and management surely will be drawing on a wealth of inspiring vocabulary and memorable phrases. These often indicate elements of inner qualities, individual skill sets, team functioning, features of role and rank as well as aspirations in terms of goals and bigger pictures. This spirit has been articulated most recently in England in The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the leadership and management standard of the associated Quality Standards (Department for Education, 2015). Few would dispute the virtue of acquiring such positive traits and skills as empathy, understanding, trust, reliability, adaptability, transparency, facilitating empowerment and the like. But what do these desirable features have to say for residential child care environments, where the mainstay of

everyday life is dependent upon establishing and developing thriving relationships and many of these aspects are thus regarded as central to, and thereby endemic in day-to-day practice? As an illustration of this point, if the word cloud shown here is taken to entail qualities and

skills to work towards acquiring or improving, is it possible to discern the target audience? Would these be aspirational goals for young people, for staff or for managers? It is anticipated that most of those involved in residential establishments will respond 'it's all three'. Alternatively, does the word cloud simply identify the elements which underpin good management? Or does the word cloud denote the concerns of good leadership? An interesting thought is that many staff teams in spheres other than residential child care may not recognise some – or the majority – of this word cloud vocabulary as being anything other than embellishments to their work. The point being made here is that the principal purpose of children's homes lies in enabling others to develop, communicate, manage and model and in turn, each of these is an essential aspect of good leadership and management in children's homes: the processes run as parallel to each other and to a large extent they function interdependently.

The above thought alone is indicative of the complexity of leadership and management within residential child care environments. Needless to say, each of the above aspects is an ongoing element of the core task, and as such will be fluid in nature. Furthermore, just as there are 'shifts in levels of cohesion, consistency and motivation among and between managers and their teams' (Hicks, Gibbs, Weatherly, & Byford, 2007, p. 126), similar changes occur within the group of young people. In the light of these dynamic levels of flux, it comes as no surprise that what accounts for variation in leadership and management between children's homes remains an abiding question, providing the subject for debates, training and changes in policies. Here, the detailed body of knowledge developed by Adrian Ward springs to mind. In particular, Ward draws attention to the importance of factors which enable leadership to work effectively. The following quotation may help to encapsulate briefly this thinking:

> What conditions and resources will provide the best opportunities for high quality leadership to flourish in residential care and how can other systems support and contribute to this? (Ward, 2009, p. 99).

These questions merit emphasis, not least because leadership and management are examined repeatedly in literature as though they function independently within teams or are a product solely of them or of individuals, without recognition of the potential influences which exist across the boundary of the functional group. There are many examples of exceptional management and inspirational leadership within children's homes where task-oriented work becomes thwarted by decisions or blocks which occur outwith the environs of the home itself, perhaps due to organisational policies or procedures, or to the agendas of non-residential teams or individual professionals. That is not to say that this functioning is perverse and it is certainly worth remembering that influences across the boundary have potential for holding positive sway and often result in beneficial effects. A systems-based approach across teams and agencies is likely to move a step nearer to understanding what enables good leadership and management practice to take root, blossom and be sustained in residential care.

Prior to introducing each of the papers that comprise this edition, I will return briefly to the wheel analogy mentioned at the beginning of this editorial by highlighting the point that there are very different treads used by the authors to cover the terrain of leadership

and management. Students with whom I have been fortunate to work alongside usually remind me (kindly!) that I note frequently that while there is no point in re-inventing the wheel, it is very important to ensure that the type of tyre is fit for the purpose of the journey. While I am both guilty of repetition and certain that those thoughts are too lyrical to be my own, the strength of the analogy lies in it allowing recognition of different routes and resources, which may lead towards attaining an overall perspective or goal. Correspondingly, it is with pleasure that I turn to introducing the very different foci of the papers in this collection.

The first article in this issue reports on an interview with Graham McPheat from the University of Strathclyde. In 'Positive leadership and management in residential child care: what do these involve and how do we bring them about?', Graham draws on his present and previous experiences as both an educator and a children's homes manager in Scotland. Throughout the interview, Graham considers some of the fundamental issues relating to the distinctions between leadership and management, ways of establishing leadership approaches in children's homes, and links with the concept of 'the learning organisation' and managing risk. He concludes by reflecting on what needs to be incorporated into the 'good leadership toolkit'.

The second article, 'The Role of Internal Managers of Children's Homes in a Time of Crisis and Change: a Social Pedagogic Perspective from Italy', is by Dr Silvio Premoli. In focusing on the detailed and complex nature of the managers' role within changing and uncertain contexts, Silvio highlights the importance of having 'a figure who connects and guides the various professionals in such a way that fatigue and discouragement do not completely undermine the effectiveness of their interventions'.

Silvio's analysis connects well with the next article, 'Director's Leadership and Burnout among Residential Child Care Workers: Possible Implications for Practice', which brings a perspective based on research carried out in Israel by Dr Shulamit Pinchover, Dr Shalhevet Attar-Schwartz and Hila Matattov-Sekeles. From their large-scale study, the authors present an examination of aspects of residential directors' leadership and trust and show how high levels of these are linked to lower levels of burnout among staff. Shulamit, Shalhevet and Hila illustrate the 'importance of a positive working atmosphere and trusting relationships between workers and directors....[and] the benefits of a director sharing his or her knowledge with staff and his or her openness to the staff's views'.

Writing from a practice-based perspective, Nat O'Brien offers insight gained as co-ordinator of a two-year intervention based in the north-west of England, where a programme of work was designed to improve the experiences of young people who are preparing to leave residential care. 'Supporting young people's experience of preparing to leave children's homes to live independently: implications for leadership' discusses two examples where co-production techniques enabled young people's viewpoints to become central, leadership to be shared across different parts of organisations and in turn, very positive changes to occur for young people, as well as for practice and policies.

The penultimate article in this issue also looks at experiences over the longer term, this time by drawing on a research perspective. In 'Something lost along the way: changing patterns of leadership in Scottish residential schools', Dr Mark Smith explores life histories of those in leadership roles in the sector over the past 50 years. Mark's account examines 'general trends from innovation towards regulation and from personalised towards standardised leadership practices'. Mark acknowledges that 'This skewing of the task, one might argue, may be a consequence of political and managerial cultures, which regard values as something to be codified rather than lived and knowledge as something that can be vested in abstract standards rather than practical experience'.

Our final paper on the theme of leadership and management is by Dr Louise Hill and Neil Gentleman. 'The Importance of Champions: Developing National Guidance for the External Management of Residential Child care Establishments in Scotland' investigates the role of external managers of residential children's homes. Louise and Neil introduce the context which led to the production of the guidance, together with how this was brought about, before moving on to consider some of the fundamental aspects of the role. In doing this, the authors indicate 'the ways in which external managers serve to champion, enable and support good practice within residential child care settings'.

Additionally, there are two books reviewed in this issue: Ward, A. (2014) *Leadership in Residential Child care: A Relationship -based Approach,* Norwich: The Smokehouse Press. Reviewed by Nigel Horner of the University of Lincoln and Burton, J. (2015). *Leading good care: the task, heart and art of managing social care.* Jessica Kingsley, reviewed by Graham McPheat from the University of Strathclyde.

It has been a privilege to work with the dedicated contributors to this issue and the members of the Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care editorial team. I offer my sincere thanks to those concerned for the energetic and good-humoured support which I have received.

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