

Editorial

Welcome to the September 2014 issue of the Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care. It's a pivotal time here in Scotland with the Scottish Independence Referendum fast approaching. On 18 September, Scotland will decide whether to remain in the United Kingdom or to become an independent nation. There has been a flurry of discussion and debate, the like of which I've not seen during my 15 years in this country.

In 2013, a bill was passed¹ giving 16 and 17 year olds living in Scotland² the right to vote in this referendum. This is the first time young people in this age group have been extended the right to vote in a UK major ballot. There has been debate about their preparedness to engage in the political process, but scant evidence to inform the contrasting views. In order to fill this gap, 14 to 17 years olds were surveyed about their attitudes towards politics (Eichorn, 2013). It was found that they have significantly more interested in politics than those who are 18 and older³.

Young people in residential, through or aftercare may encounter a variety of obstacles to voting. Using Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation, the Journal's own Graham Connelly and Jamie Kinloch from Who Cares? Scotland queried Scottish local authorities and the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) about action, taken or planned, to support looked after young people to vote in the referendum. The FOI inquiry was carried out in January and February 2014, and all local authorities and the SPS responded. At that time, only nine local authorities had taken action. Their actions included the provision of direct support for young people or the indirect action of advising staff. Of the respondents who indicated planned action, indirect action was the most common. While the authors acknowledge the scale of the organisational task involved in supporting young people to participate, they also rightly point out:

exercising the right to vote is a fundamental human right and the national care standards which underpin all public care include the right to make choices. Often this is interpreted in the narrow sense of making choices about aspects of care but it can also be understood to refer to the right to exercise choice in all areas of life, including participating in political activity. (p.9)

This referendum has the potential to be a pivotal experience in the lives of young people in care. Far too many children and young people in residential care have experienced social exclusion - as have their families. Participating in an election is one way to experience inclusion in wider society. And participation isn't just about voting; it's about the discussions, debates and even the canvassing that young people can take part in. Perhaps more importantly, it's about experiencing the political process as relevant and

¹ Scottish Referendum (Franchise) Act 2013:
www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2013/13/pdfs/asp_20130013_en.pdf

² For the finer details of voter eligibility, please see relevant information on Young Scot:
<http://www.youngscot.org/info/2737-how-do-i-register-to-vote?gclid=CNixyfCep8ACFesBwwodrGcA1w>

³ 57% of the 1018 respondents indicated either 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of interest in politics, as compared with 31% of respondents aged 18 or older who were asked the same question in the 2012 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (Eichorn, 2013).

accessible. So whether one is for or against independence, this referendum is an opportunity to support young people to become engaged in the political process. Connelly and Kinlochan provide sources of information and support towards this end, and their report can be accessed here: <http://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/48242/>

In the lead up to the Referendum, here at the Journal, we have decided to do something we haven't done before. We have invited comment and riposte from a proponent and an opponent of Scottish independence. Mark Smith has argued why it would be in the interests of children and young people who are looked after for Scotland to leave the United Kingdom, and Garry Coutts has provided arguments for why it would be better for Scotland to remain. Each author comes from a different professional background, so their styles and approaches to how they construct their respective arguments will look different. I encourage our readers to look beyond these surface differences to interrogate the substance of their arguments. Scotland's upcoming decision will have significant ramifications for the future of its people, including children and young people who require alternative care. There is a lot to consider. We hope these two pieces make a contribution to your considerations.

Our next three pieces are full-length academic articles and have been peer-reviewed. First, Terje Halvorsen makes a compelling case for the remit of social workers (including residential child care practitioners) to be extended to encompass a more comprehensive promotion of looked-after children's educational achievement. There has been growing support for his position over the last several years, but Halvorsen goes well beyond the realm of liaising with teachers and supporting homework to include methodologies for facilitating children's cognitive development so that they can cope with the demands of education. The implications of such an extension apply to multiple levels of the system, including direct practice, workforce development, inter-professional working and curriculum development for qualifying training and continuous professional development (CPD).

Our next article tells of a recent pilot study in Ireland. Noelle FitzGerald, Danielle Gaynor, Andrew Sheppard, and Ian Gargan describe what appears to be a highly effective health intervention for young people in residential care. The fitness and nutritional guidance programme, or FNGP, was tailored to a residential child care context and all young people who took part appeared to derive substantial benefit. What was especially impressive about this programme was the consistently high levels of participation across the sample (something that can be challenging for young people whether or not in care), and the movement towards or maintenance of a healthy body mass index score for all participants except one.

The next article also addresses well-being, but from the perspective of place. Alison Clark, Claire Cameron and Stefan Kleipoedszus explore the meanings of home and place from the perspective of young people and staff in residential child care, using photography alongside more traditional qualitative methods. Their pilot study highlights the multi-dimensional nature of 'home' and the ambiguities of creating 'home-like' environments in institutional spaces. I've argued elsewhere that we should step back and explore the taken-for-granted notion of care, and their article provides a similarly fresh view of home.

Also included in this issue is a practice article from Victoria Hull who informs us about the *Open Doors, Open Minds* research and subsequent *Higher Education Handbooks for Care Leavers*. It is well known that young people who have experienced care encounter significant and complex barriers to higher education, and these handbooks, informed by the aforementioned research, make crucial information available in an accessible manner. Her article also encouragingly notes a handbook addressed to *further education* currently being developed for care leavers here in Scotland.

Gavin Sinclair provides a follow up to his article in our May 2014 issue with a piece about Jonny, one of the young cast members of *Please Listen* (a play jointly written and performed by Gavin and some young people at Kibble Care and Education Centre). Jonny now works for Kibble's 'The Experience', an entertainment and conference centre. Moreover, he has authored another play, this time about his own life. He has performed it on over 40 occasions, with consistently high praise from his audiences. Sinclair tells the story of these developments, includes audience reactions, and then offers some important insights about Jonny's success.

Our last article is a short account of an upcoming study on forgiveness and transitional justice. Samina Karim and Andrew Kendrick offer a discussion of each concept and its relevance to historical abuse in residential child care in Scotland and internationally. Brought together, forgiveness and transitional justice offer us a way to think about how we might collectively and meaningfully move forward. This short piece ends with an invitation to victims/survivors, advocates, care providers, direct-care practitioners or members of local or national government to participate in the research.

Finally, two books are discussed in our reviews section. First, Ben Farrugia reviews *Pathways through education for young people in care*, edited by Sonia Jackson. This review offers a useful complement to both Halvorsen's and Hull's articles. Second, Autumn Roesch-Marsh discusses *The Panopticon*, a novel by Jenni Fagan who, herself, lived in residential child care. I had been aware of the novel, but having read Roesch-Marsh's review, it has gone on my to-be-read list.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the journal and are interested in your feedback. We also continue to welcome articles from practitioners and managers; to further this aim, we are growing our mentoring scheme to support first-time writers. Please consider making a contribution and encourage others to do the same. We can be contacted via sjrcc@celcis.org.

Laura Steckley

Joint Editor

Book Review Editor

References:

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