

# A journal like no other: Engaging with 20 years of the Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care

**James P. Anglin**

## **Abstract**

The first 20 years of the SJRCC has offered a rich array of articles, perspectives and experiences from across the full spectrum of the child and youth care field internationally. A thematic analysis reveals the most common theme over the life of the journal to be 'staffing issues/practice', with 'international' second, and the three themes of 'education', 'transitions and leaving care' and 'historical reflections' in a virtual tie for the bronze medal. Accessibility and a welcoming of authors from diverse backgrounds while maintaining rigour in its selection of peer-reviewed research articles contributes to the SJRCC being indeed 'a journal like no other.'

## **Keywords**

Residential childcare, childcare history, key childcare themes, threshold concepts

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I was asked by Graham Connelly, the editor of the *SJRCC* since 2012, if I would write a perspective piece in recognition of the journal's 20th anniversary. Of course, I was pleased to be asked, and eager to use the opportunity to (spoiler alert) read some articles I had not yet read. It is a challenge to keep up with everything published across the seven child and youth care journals with which I am in some way involved. I rationalised this task as an invitation 'to look back to move forward.'

I want to acknowledge that I was aided in this task by Graham himself who answered all my questions about the origins, purposes, logistics and evolution of the *SJRCC*, as well as by Andy Kendrick with some background on the founding of the journal. Also, Gemma Watson and Craig McCreadie sent me their summary analysis of all the articles and book reviews that appeared in the journal over its two decades of existence. Thank you all.

Where does one start to make sense of 417 articles and book reviews? And a few poems; personally, I would like to see more poems. Poems are often the way those with lived experience in care formulate and communicate their meaning making.

The first thing I want to say is how impressed I was in looking through the diversity of material, and reading what I could within my time limit. I learned a great deal, and my passion for CYC was continually renewed and strengthened. The *SJRCC* has attracted such a wide range of contributors, across many dimensions and levels of the child and youth care field, and I credit the editors over the years with creating and maintaining an open, welcoming and supportive approach, especially for those who may not be experienced in publishing in formal journals.

Andy Kendrick, a founder of the journal and Professor of Residential Child Care at the University of Strathclyde, understood this journal as a way to:

engage with the residential child care sector in Scotland. I thought the journal was an important means of communicating the latest research and policy and practice developments with

residential child care managers and practitioners. I also wanted to encourage young people (although this probably came later) and professionals to be writing about their experience... (personal communication, June 30, 2022)

To my mind, the journal has been highly successful in attracting contributors with diverse backgrounds and allowing them to speak in very personal ways about their learning, their struggles and engagements with young people, and the complex systems that have evolved to address children's needs. It is not an easy feat for a journal to be rigorous in its expectations of quality while being personable in its editorial culture. The four editors over the first 20 years, Andy, Irene Stevens, Laura Steckley and Graham, have provided committed, passionate and skilled leadership for the journal, continuing to serve the needs of the residential childcare sector while being open to broader sociological perspectives such as those around poverty and the impacts of capitalism. Perhaps most impressively, they have managed all this with minimal financial resources and a transition to free access to boot.

On the logistics side of things, many people over the years have worked behind the scenes, many of whom were connected with the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC) and in more recent times, CELCIS (Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection) as well. When the journal decided to go online, the webmasters and support staff at CELCIS were instrumental in facilitating this process. I find the *SJRCC* website to be one of the most user-friendly journal websites I know, and accessing articles and journal issues across the decades has been a joy rather than a hassle. As Graham mentioned to me, accessibility has always been in the journal's DNA.

I am not familiar with all those who have made the journal work and thrive over so many years, but I do know about the stellar contributions that have been, and continue to be, made by Laura Steckley. Laura has not only overseen the book reviews, now in the capable hands of Leanne McIver, she has been a key part of steering the journal through inevitable dilemmas and challenges. It was she who championed the creation of a 'peer reviewed' component in recognition of the demands placed upon academic researchers, while maintaining the

impressive diversity of overall contributions. Over the years, the *SJRCC* book reviews have been responsible for me ordering a number of texts, with the latest one being thanks to a review by Graham himself on *Labours of Love: The Crisis of Care* by Madeleine Bunting.

I think the *SJRCC* is indeed 'a journal like no other' due to the manner in which it welcomes and displays the diversity of academic, professional and experiential dimensions in such an accessible and respectful way, while retaining a sense of rigour and thoughtfulness (traditional Scottish values).

Over the years, while the journal began with a strong Scottish, UK and European focus, it has grown into a truly international publication. The journal editors and the cadre of reviewers have maintained their welcoming stance by assisting contributors for whom English is not a first language to be published. This can be a time-consuming task, but one highly worthwhile and greatly appreciated by both the authors and the readers who are exposed to a range of cultures, traditions and ways of thinking.

While I cannot (and should not) try to focus on any specific articles, editorials or book reviews, I do feel a need to somehow 'connect the dots' between them. What patterns can we discern from scanning (and sometimes reading) over 5,000 electronic pages of fascinating writing? In addition, I might add, to the over 5,000 pages of other materials already surrounding my beleaguered home office writing space. Each morning I struggle to clear an 8.5 by 11 inch (North American standard) spot on which to place my writing pad.

As an aside, when I submitted my PhD at Leicester University, I needed the written permission of the University Provost to submit my dissertation on North American size paper, as trying to use British A4 paper (an awkward 8.27 by 11.7 inches) in my printer would not have been possible. I am grateful that such permission was graciously granted to this colonial from the backwoods of Canada where paper is plentiful, but apparently of a peculiar size for those in Great Britain. Perhaps the fact that I lived in *British* Columbia helped.

Where was I? Oh yes, trying to find a way to make sense of the thousands of pages of insightful perspectives, wisdom, experiences, emotions, visions and critiques from a great diversity of authors from all corners of children's services, and some beyond.

Thanks to the painstaking content analysis done by Craig McCreddie and Gemma Watson, I was handed a list of the 110 identified themes and the number of times they appeared as primary or secondary themes in the 417 articles. I think you will be interested to learn that the most common theme across the 20 years was 'staffing issues/practice.' Clearly, the needs of people charged with doing the work of child and youth care have been central to the commitments and identity of this journal. At the same time, virtually every issue contains vivid threads of the lived experiences of the children and young people in our CYC systems. When I read through some of the issues, I began to feel myself wrapped in a many coloured cloak that was intricately woven from the lived experiences of the adults and young people dancing (as Mark Krueger would say) together through residential and community-based care.

One of my favourite CYC book titles is a little known and almost impossible to find text published by FICE-International in about 1984-85. (I find it terribly annoying when books and reports are undated.) It is actually the sub-title I love – Living with Others as a Profession (Courtioux, Jones, Kalcher, Steinhauser, Tuggener & Waaldijk, undated). To my mind, one of the great strengths of the *SJRCC* as an evolving, organic entity is the pervasive sense throughout the pages of a vital life force at work, and at play. The authors seem to really love living and working with others, holistically, whatever their particular roles might be. In many cases, their sense of passion seems to sing from the pages. And that is a beautiful and somewhat rare thing to find so consistently in a formal journal that also appeals to academic researchers.

The second most common theme across the years was 'international.' This theme is comprised of national accounts from places such as India, Africa, Asia, Australia and North America, practice and policy-related articles by international authors, as well as attempts to formulate global perspectives and understandings.

In a virtual dead heat for the bronze medal are 'education', 'transitions and leaving care' and 'historical reflections.' I expect the term 'education' covers many forms of learning, teaching, mentoring and pedagogy – all key dimensions of a vibrant professional field. The notions of 'transitions and leaving care' speak not only to young people moving out of the system, but also to the fluid, lava-lamp nature of modern life, with each of us highly conscious that we are on a journey, morphing, sometimes moving away from things, sometimes moving towards things, and sometimes just wandering. But we need to remember that 'not all who wander are lost' (J.R.R. Tolkien in *Fellowship of the Ring*). All journeying is purposive even if it takes us a lifetime to discern the pattern.

And the many 'historical reflections' interspersed throughout the journal issues keep us aware of the enduring wisdom to be found in the writings of those who understood even 200 years ago the need for a new profession grounded in the realities of residential childcare. Indeed Larry Brendtro and I contributed an article to the *SJRCC* on the importance of a profession knowing and valuing its history in order to find a good way forward (Anglin & Brendtro, 2017).

And the book reviews. I expect many of you love books as I do. I have realised with the push toward a 'paperless society' how much I am in love with paper. When I spent a year doing research and writing in Oxford, England, I could not go a week without entering Blackwell's bookshop or one of the many used-book stores in the town. I had to go and 'rub up against the stacks', so to speak, like a cat against the pant leg of its master. Now I have learned also to enjoy the electronic access to material and I do not lament that most journals are no longer in print form. Saving trees while also increasing access for all are important as we strive for equity and environmental sustainability.

At one point, I wondered in an email to Craig and Gemma if they would be able to consider mapping the over 100 themes they had identified on to the set of 'threshold concepts' produced in Laura Steckley's fascinating work (Steckley, 2013, 2020a, 2020b), but time did not allow for this. Just perusing the two sets of themes and concepts, I realised this might be a challenging task, and my impression was it might not even be a fruitful one. Perhaps some braver soul might give that a try at some later date.

The astute reader of the *SJRCC* may have noticed that although the year 2012 appears in the website access tabs for issues and articles, there were actually no issues published that year. Graham explained that this was the year CELCIS was formed, and the press of start-up activities and organisational changes meant the journal had to hit the pause button until the first issue of 2013 could be assembled and published. But in other years, we have been able to eagerly anticipate and enjoy two or three issues filled with some of the most recent and ground-breaking ideas in the children's services field.

To everyone who has been even a small part of creating and maintaining this unique and valuable journal, I say on behalf of all your readers, 'Well done, and thank you.' Scotland continues to lead the CYC world in so many ways, but especially with helping us to understand the need to put love at the heart of everything we do with families and young people.

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## About the author

Dr Jim Anglin began his career as a front-line child and youth care counsellor in 1970, working in a mental health centre and then as coordinator of a

community-based group home for adolescents before becoming involved in social policy development, children's services design and management, and education, research and training. He is Emeritus Professor and a former Director in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria, BC, Canada, is a keen amateur historian of the child and youth care profession, and is a Research Affiliate of the Residential Child Care Project, Bronfenbrenner Centre for Translational Research at Cornell University. He is the author of *Pain, Normality and the Struggle for Congruence: Reinterpreting Residential Care for Children and Youth* (Routledge, 2002) and coordinating editor of *Perspectives in Professional Child and Youth Care* (Haworth, 1990).