

Received: 05/02/2024

Accepted: 05/02/2024

Keywords:

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, social work, social care, Scotland.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.17868/strath.00088909>

Book Review

Development of Children's Care Services in Scotland: Report for the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

By Kendrick, A., Lux, E., McGregor, S., and Withington, R.

<https://www.childabuseinquiry.scot/evidence/development-care-services-scotland-report>

Publisher: University of Strathclyde

Year of Publication: 2021

Reviewed by: Kirstie Maclean

The idea of reading an 800-page report is fairly daunting for researchers, let alone for over-stretched residential workers and social workers. Nevertheless, I would urge you to read this report as it simply and very comprehensively provides the history, development, successes, downsides, and crises of the children's care services in which we are involved. Whilst mainly covering the years 1900 – 2014, it also delves further back into the past, providing a real understanding of how and why services developed, and exploring some of the distinctive aspects of Scottish services. Although it particularly describes children's services in Scotland, comparisons are made with practice in England and Wales, and it is likely that some of the practice will also be recognised elsewhere.

There are a number of striking features in the history, which is laid out chronologically and can thus be read straight through or dipped into. For instance, until after the Second World War, it was seen as acceptable for children to live in local authority poor houses alongside adults, some of whom had mental health issues or were alcoholic. Children were often 'boarded out' (fostered) on crofts and farms hundreds of miles from their city homes because they could provide farm labour; the quality of care they might receive came a poor second. A more recent striking feature has been the plethora of regulations, reports, reviews, guidance, and recommendations we have experienced in



Scotland, particularly over the last 30 years. Quite frequently, there was little opportunity to implement policies or recommendations before the next ones came out. My own reflection on these processes is that they had benign intentions, were usually helpful, and were often initiated because of harmful events happening to children. However, insufficient resources (financial, training, consultancy, staffing, etc.) were provided for workers and carers to fully embrace and successfully implement the recommended changes. Also, thorough and sustained follow-up to see that changes were working over years rather than months did not always occur. Having worked in social work and social care organisations since the 1970s, I am fully aware that change processes can get diluted or derailed as we deal with more pressing crises or cuts in resources. We need to take regular opportunities to stand back and review our practice to ensure best practice is consistently achieved.

The report has a very comprehensive bibliography which should inspire further reading. If I have one criticism it is that it doesn't have an index, but I can understand the pressure to get this thoroughly researched report finished, given that it was commissioned by the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry. While it was written with a particular purpose, it could and should have a much wider readership. For those like me who have been in the field for many decades, it serves as a reminder of where we have come from and what we are still hoping to achieve. I found myself saying, "Oh, I'd forgotten about that" and "Goodness, was that what we were supposed to be doing?" For those who are newer to the field, it will hopefully provide guidance on what to emulate and what to avoid.

I consider this report should be used to guide current and future policy and practice, both nationally and locally. Scottish government, social work and social care organisations should consider the best ways to do this so that staff and carers can consistently achieve best practice. In order to know where we are going, it is extremely helpful to know where we have come from. This report firmly reminds us of that.

About the reviewer

Kirstie Maclean is a retired social work consultant. A worker, manager, inspector, and consultant in a wide range of children and family services in England and Scotland from 1972-2018, she was the first director of the Scottish Institute of Residential Child Care (SIRCC) from 2000 to 2003. Kirstie is currently undertaking research into the history of the Dean and Cauvin Young People's Trust which was founded in Edinburgh in 1733.

